

WILDERNESS AND MISSIONS: A THEOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING AND
SUSTAINING YOUNG LEADERS IN MISSION

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DEDICATION

For my beloved Becky as we journey together in Christ.

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¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 154-155.

ABSTRACT

Throughout history, God has used the wilderness as a special setting for transformation. Yet today in our increasingly urbanized world, young people are less able to experience the wilderness. Young people today are unsure how to engage a world of poverty, religions, violence, and clashing civilizations. Thus, young leaders need reflective dialogue toward a theology of apprenticeship for missions. In the past 15 years the author has spent nearly a year in the wilderness with groups of young people. This study provides a theological framework to understand why the wilderness has been a common setting for developing dynamic mission leaders.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

As we have listened to Christian leaders throughout Asia over the past several years, it is agreed that one of the most pressing needs is a strategy to address the vacuum of leadership within the church in Asia. Hwa Yung, a mission leader in Singapore, recently described the problem of leadership in Asia: “There is almost a total vacuum here.... Because there is a dearth of older and wiser leaders in this part of the world, there is insufficient modeling and mentoring of younger leaders.²

In New Zealand where we have lived most recently, Church attendance and volunteerism are at an all time low. The suicide rate among teens is among the highest in the world. The average New Zealander feels that the church is largely irrelevant. As a result, the need among youth workers in New Zealand is a renewed vision of the body of Christ as a *mission-community*.

As we look at the Scriptures and mission history, it is apparent that when the church becomes marginalized, it can either turn inward or it will engage the world. It is our conviction that if we are to develop young leaders who will engage in global missions, we must renew our commitment to Jesus’ way of apprenticeship as the means for preparing and sustaining them in missions.

² Yung, Hwa. *Some Challenges for Leadership Development for Mission in East Asia*, Transformation 21/4 Oct. 2004: 234-237.

The Need for a Paradigm Shift

In the midst of an ever-increasingly urban world, Jesus' strategy for changing people's lives and nurturing mission community among His disciples has not changed. Yet what seems to have changed is our commitment (or lack thereof) to making disciples through apprenticeship. So often, visible communities of faith (i.e. churches) invest most of their time, energy and resources into *attractional* models of evangelism and discipleship. We assert that the church must resist this shift and must continually reassert disciple-making in the way of Jesus Christ through apprenticeship.

Jesus entered into history after four hundred years of silence following Malachi's prophetic ministry. He came to radically shift the prevailing *inward* paradigm among Israel. The Jews, living under the pressure of the Roman government, were marginalized. Rather than being a mission-focused people of God, which was their commission through Abraham, they had become inwardly focused (Genesis 12:1-3).³ And rather than engaging the world, they had withdrawn from God's mission for them to "be a light to the nations."

Jesus came to transform lives, communities, tribes, clans, cities, and nations to the very ends of the earth. His way of transforming lives was *incarnational rather than attractional*. He formed a diverse group of men and women into a mission-community. In just three years, He had developed an estimated one hundred devoted disciples who carried on His ministry after the Ascension. And they multiplied themselves through following His model for change.⁴ Jesus chose young people in their late teens and twenties to change the world much like the way yeast shapes and

³ All scripture references from the New American Standard of the Holy Bible, unless the quoted by another author in a different version: Zodhiates, Spiros, ed. The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible; New American Standard Bible. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1990.

⁴ Robert Coleman, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 14.

changes a lump of dough. Jesus' focus on young leaders was strategic. After the Ascension, these *young* leaders were able to make disciples through three or four generations—thus solidifying the movement which has now stretched to most of the people groups of the world. Yet over 10,000 un-reached people groups remain in spite of the missionary activity of the last one hundred years.⁵ How will we today be able to effectively develop young leaders who will enthusiastically and courageously proclaim the gospel message among the un-reached?

The Current Prevailing Paradigm

In answering this question, we will first look at Jesus' intent for His followers to bring the gospel to all of creation. There is no shortage of literature addressing the subjects of evangelism and discipleship. Leadership has become a *buzz* word for the Twenty First Century. There are countless conferences, seminars, parachurch groups, motivational speakers, etc. who promise to help groups learn how to reach people with the Gospel. Todd Johnson provides a very important perspective on the recent history of the church's mission efforts. If taken seriously his research leaves us with few choices. If we are to truly advance the Kingdom by breaking new ground and renewing previously "reached" mission fields, we must radically change how we go about missions to the young today. Johnson mentions several global plans which have been attempted in the past one hundred years. In 1900 it was, "The evangelization of the world in this generation," in 1963 it was "The master plan of evangelism," and in 1986 it was "One million native missionaries" just to name a few of the dozen or so recent global plans.

⁵ Todd Johnson, "World Christian Trends 2005," IFMA/EFMA, St. Louis, September 2004, 5.

Yet even with the significant fruit resulting from these plans, Johnson offers some startling observations about the state of missions today. His findings will filter back to our discussion regarding how to reach the young people of every city through developing leaders through outdoor wilderness experiences. Johnson writes:

There is a strong tendency to recreate plans without reference to previous plans. The most significant problem with this list of plans is the passage of time. One can see this in Samuel Zwemer's *Unoccupied Mission Fields of Africa and Asia* (1911). He wrote this book in response to a request for a pithy survey on the unfinished task from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. Much has stayed the same in the nearly 100 years since the book was published. His description of the unfinished task in 1911 stretching from Morocco to Indonesia is largely true today.

He asserts that even with the notable success of many of these plans, over ninety percent of all Christian evangelism is still aimed at people groups with sizable Christian influence, and does not break new ground with non-Christian people groups. As long as this is the case, the world will not be evangelized and the un-reached peoples will not be reached.⁶

Following this line of reasoning, in our study, we have observed that much of the material and training available to aid leaders in developing global evangelism and discipleship plans focuses on: 1) How Jesus taught (Method/Style), 2) What Jesus taught (Content), and 3) Why Jesus taught (Purpose). Two of the most widely embraced examples of this trend are: *The Purpose Driven Church*, and *40 Days of Purpose*. These three aspects of Jesus' teaching are important to understand in order to train disciples to be mission-focused. Yet even with wide availability of such excellent resources, why are we still making such little headway globally among un-reached young people?

⁶ Ibid., 6.

A Paradigm Shift Needed in Teaching: Toward Life-Changing Experiential Learning

Over the past fifteen years the author and his wife have worked primarily with university and high school age young people. We have taken hundreds of young people and their leaders to evangelism-focused camps, and facilitated opportunities for them to hear the Gospel and grow in their faith through large and small groups. Yet as we look at the fruit of this ministry (by the grace of God), many of the young people whose faith has become most rooted and fruitful are those who have participated in a wilderness and/or missions trip. Why is this? A common denominator we have identified is the young people who participated in wilderness or mission trips encountered Jesus in an environment of *experiential* teaching and modeling; primarily in the outdoors. What contributed largely to their transformation was the *setting in which they learned*, i.e. the wilderness, or in the context of serving others on a team.

We have led over thirty groups of young people (group sizes averaging 10-15) on wilderness journeys encompassing over three hundred days of living with young people in the context of community in the outdoors. We have observed that although the *how, what, and why* of Jesus' teaching is vastly important, it is often the *where, to whom, and when*, of His teaching that fuels radical change of heart. In other words, being aware of the *setting* in which Jesus taught is just as important as understanding the *form* of His teaching. *Timing* and *environment* are critical elements in the learning process. Yet most contemporary paradigms of teaching focus heavily on *style of communication*. The emphasis is on acquiring speaking skills to be able to effectively capture people's imagination through intelligent rhetoric. Yet the weakness in this paradigm is that most teaching today happens in *contrived settings*, i.e. a church building, Sunday school class, through television or video programs, etc.

When Jesus taught His disciples He did so in *real* settings. His stories and illustrations were not contrived to make a point, rather He crafted teaching to sow seeds of life into people's hearts in the context of a real experience the audience was either currently experiencing, or had recently experienced, so that their frame of reference was genuine and fresh.

We are particularly interested in how Jesus took His disciples on *journeys* in order to facilitate teachable moments from situations that occurred. He taught along roads, in fields, in boats, in the Temple, in Synagogues, and while resting in gardens. Our premise is that if we look at the setting of His teaching and try to discern the impact of the experiential aspect of the learning process, we will re-discover ways to reach the hearts of young people today.

When Jesus taught, He was not interested in giving people information. Rather He gave them Himself, the message (*logos*). Information is passive whereas a *message* evokes and calls for a response. It is widely accepted today that learning increases as stress and tension increases.⁷ In other words, *our senses are more keenly involved in the learning process as we are pushed out of our comfort zone*. Jesus was the master of applying just enough stress to observers (especially His band of followers) so that they would begin to ask questions rooted in the core of their being. Yet, He did not push them over the edge. There is a point where if people are overstressed, the learning curve goes down because survival becomes the focus. A recent study on the value of stress-experiences supports this view:

This study provides encouraging empirical support for the philosophy of stress-inoculation training as implemented in an Outward Bound program. The cutting edge of challenge, it seems, can and does make people stronger, particularly when the salve of social support is applied.⁸

⁷ The topic of experiential learning research will be further discussed in chapter three.

⁸ James Neill and Katica Dias, "Adventure Education and Resilience." *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 2, no. 1 (2001): 41.

As we will find in our thesis, Jesus strategically took His disciples on “stress-inoculating” journeys during His ministry in order to deepen their faith.

The overall goal of our thesis is to show how Jesus strategically changed the lives of His disciples and formed a mission-community by leading them through wilderness experiences that heightened their learning and gave Him opportunity to illustrate and teach Kingdom truth in the context of real life situations. His teaching was not a contrived method of engaging the imagination through rhetoric alone (like much of our contemporary teaching), rather it was an apprenticeship (often *in* the wilderness) to develop leaders *to be like the salt which every city needs.*

Principles of Experiential Learning: Secular Research

Many secular groups have discovered the effectiveness of experiential learning models. Outward Bound is an outdoor education school which excels in facilitating this type of learning environment. Emily Cousins in her book, *Roots; From Outward Bound to Expeditionary Learning* synthesizes several expeditionary design principles:

Given fundamental levels of health, safety, and love, all people can and want to learn. We believe Expeditionary Learning harnesses the natural passion to learn and is a powerful method for developing the curiosity, skills, knowledge, and courage needed to imagine a better world and work toward realizing it. Learning happens best with emotion, challenge, and the requisite support. People discover their abilities, values, ‘grand passions’, and responsibilities in situations that offer adventure and the unexpected. They must have tasks that require perseverance, fitness, craftsmanship, imagination, self-discipline, and significant achievement. A primary job of the educator is to help students overcome their fear and discover they have more in them than they think.... Learning is fostered best in small groups where there is trust, sustained caring, and mutual respect among all the members of the learning community.... All students must be assured a fair measure of success in learning in order to nurture the confidence and capacity to take risks and rise to increasingly

difficult challenges. But it is also important to experience failure, to overcome negative inclinations, to prevail against adversity, and to learn to turn disabilities into opportunities.⁹

The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) also specializes in wilderness education. In *The New Wilderness Handbook*, Paul Petzholdt (the founder of NOLS) outlines several principles of experiential teaching in the outdoors:

The very act of backpacking is a learning experience. Rhythmic breathing, use of leg muscles, methods of going up-and downhill, and other trail techniques are explained, demonstrated, and practiced during the walk. Expedition behavior is learned as stronger members share the loads of weaker persons and the pace is determined by the slowest hiker.¹⁰

Opportunities arise in situations which, if recognized by the leader, can be used to illustrate and teach life-changing principles:

Someone develops a blister. While the leader treats the sore, he explains why it happened, why it should be attended to immediately, and how the situation can be avoided in the future.... A pack breaks. A tent is damaged by improper placement. A finger is cut. Someone falls, has a narrow escape, or performs well. All are opportunities for teaching while students' attention and motivation are stimulated.... 'Opportunity teaching' is not intended to point a finger at or embarrass any individual. The leader must indicate his appreciation of that person and the specific situation as an opportunity for teaching.¹¹

One of the most recently published outdoor leadership textbooks provides further insight in terms of the significance of capitalizing on timing (opportunities) in teaching:

One of the most powerful outdoor teaching strategies involves motivating the participant to learn by creating the 'need to know.' Outdoor leaders can facilitate situations that motivate participants to seek knowledge and skills. The leader does this by placing the participants in a situation where they seek knowledge and skills in order to accomplish the task.¹²

⁹ Greg Farrell, et. al. *Roots: From Outward Bound to Expeditionary Learning*, ed. Emily Cousins (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2000), 79-81.

¹⁰ Paul Petzoldt et. al., *The New Wilderness Handbook* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1984), 56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹² Bruce Martin et. al., *Outdoor Leadership Theory and Practice* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2006), 182.

Opportunity teaching opens doors for spiritual lessons as well. The common occurrence of a blister on the trail provides an opportunity for teaching a vital spiritual principle at the moment when it can be best illustrated in *real life*. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul writes,

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Before blisters are formed, “hot spots” develop on one’s feet; serving as “warning signs” that something is wrong and needs immediate attention. If a person stops immediately and puts on *Moleskin* or *Duct Tape*, they can prevent the “hot spot” from turning into a crippling blister. This is similar to the situation Paul describes in the Corinthian church. All of us will experience temptation in our lives. Temptations are like “hot spots” in that they are a sign of potential danger. When we are tempted, the proper response is to *stop* and deal with it immediately so that it does not become a crippling wound. A wise wilderness traveler will stop when he feels the warning signs of a potential blister in the same way that a wise young man or woman will stop and heed the warning signs of temptation, to avoid a painful consequence.

There is another spiritual principle that can be drawn from the simple blister analogy. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul describes the beauty of the Body of Christ (i.e. the church). When someone feels a “hot spot” forming on his foot during a hike, he may be reluctant to speak up and ask for help because he does not want to be a burden to the rest of the group. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul explains how the community of God (The Body of Christ) is analogous to the human body. In verses 26-27, he writes: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it, if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it.” Thus the experiential lesson learned is that even though only one person

suffers, the whole group must also “hurt” and stop to take care of the individual part (i.e. the blister). If the group doesn’t stop, then ironically the group (Body) will suffer even more in the long run as the crippled hiker becomes a burden to the group.

The author remembers one trip where a young person neglected to reveal his “hot spot” because he did not want to annoy the group by stopping for treatment. A painful blister formed on his foot. And as a consequence we had to shorten our route and the group had to disperse the load from his pack because he was in such pain. Thus, the whole group suffered *more* because of his unwillingness to stop to treat his “hot spot.” We truly are a part of a larger body, and our wounds, if un-treated do affect the rest of the Body.

Paul Petzholdt refers to the “Grasshopper Method” to explain the reality that when leading a group in the outdoors, one is able to address various subjects as *circumstances* demand. Teaching in real life situations is not systematic:

The most effective method of teaching outdoorsmanship is in the field, where introduction of a subject, its demonstration, and practical application are presented in close time sequence. We cannot cover any one subject all at once, since initially we must teach the things most necessary for that first day of walking, camping, cooking, and conservation. The next day we might cover the same subjects again and add new techniques. In this ‘grasshopper method’ of teaching, we hop from one subject to another as circumstances demand.¹³

Since Jesus came to change lives, it makes sense that He would have repeated Himself often—teaching as circumstances (often initiated by Him) arose to provide opportunities for learning and reinforcement.

¹³ Ibid., 57.

Experiential Learning: Christian Research

Surprisingly, there are only a few journals that focus on outdoor ministry. Resources are limited. Yet one thesis highlights most of the pertinent research related to this area of study. Brett DeYoung writes:

Wilderness learning is an educational process that was rediscovered by Dr. Kurt Hahn, a German Christian educator, who implemented these principles into his schools and eventually started Outward Bound in Wales, in 1942. This process was a discovery of the educational principles used by God to prepare men and women for leadership. It is a process involving the acceptance of responsibilities: of focusing on reachable challenges, of spending time in contemplation and reflection, of experiencing deprivation, of examining values, of developing compassion for others, and of testing one's faith and character.¹⁴

DeYoung's study provides a history for how wilderness ministry has been an effective tool for developing leaders in the past few decades.

Norman Rose has also conducted a particularly relevant study on moral development among adolescents who have been involved in experiential learning environments. He concludes that one of the greatest needs in working with adolescents is training them to think clearly. And experiential learning environments are best able to accomplish this task:

Adolescence would be an excellent time to introduce novel types of learning settings. Apprenticeships and mentorships would require the young person to think clearly, to acquire real (not imagined) expertise in an endeavor of interest, and to learn to avoid trivial emotional distractions. Outdoor experiential learning would also provide experiences for testing one's ability to process thought clearly, on one's own and within a group context.¹⁵

Two potential criticisms of our thesis should be noted at this point in our study. First, some have proposed that outdoor wilderness experiences appeal more to certain personality types, rather than being appropriate for all young people which is

¹⁴ Brett DeYoung, "Wilderness Camping and Leadership Development," (Master's thesis, Cincinnati Bible Seminary, Cincinnati, Ohio), 1987: 4.

¹⁵ Norman Rose, "Moral Development: The Experiential Perspective," *Journal of Moral Education* 21, no. 1 (1992): 33.

our conviction. Specifically, Cashel, Montgomery, and Lane have conducted a study which measures this potential critique through empirical research. It does raise some important questions. Using the filter of Myers Brigg categories, they found that of the outdoor participants they studied who had attended an Outward Bound type experience, “There were overwhelmingly high SSRs in the type categories of INTP, INFP, INTJ, INFJ....”¹⁶ This report claims that certain personality types may enjoy outdoor adventure programs more than others. Their observations may very well be true, but from a Biblical perspective, Jesus modeled leading *all* of His young disciples on wilderness experiences regardless of their personality. We maintain that their research is based heavily on personality theory, rather than a theological framework which is our concern.

The main difference in the above-mentioned study and our theological perspective on the relevance of outdoor wilderness experiences with young people is that secular researchers have only looked at what motivates a young person to *choose* to go on an outdoor adventure experience. By contrast, our research emphasizes a theological point of view that Jesus took the initiative and *chose* His followers; they did not choose Him. Nor do we find in the text that they chose when (or when not) to join Jesus on His journeys. What motivated them was *being chosen* and *who* chose them.

So according to Jesus’ example in developing leaders, we can look for opportunities to lead *any* type of young person on a wilderness journey—not just those who may have a propensity for this type of activity. Yes, we might need to

¹⁶ Christine Cashel; Diane Montgomery; Suzie Lane, "Personality Preferences Of Outdoor Participants." *Educational Resources Information Center*, 1996. http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/22/f4/ee.pdf. (accessed January 25, 2006): 138.

exercise wisdom and adjust the outing to be an appropriate challenge depending on who we are with, but Jesus modeled that *being a disciple means to follow Him, and part of that was to retreat into the wilderness for solitude*. Also, contrary to the findings of the previously mentioned research, the Biblical text portrays a variety of personalities in Jesus' band of disciples. The common thread for them was they were all chosen by Jesus, and they all followed Him in the wilderness as an aspect of their preparation for missions.

The second potential criticism of our thesis is that some have claimed that wilderness experiences are only available to the affluent classes—that poor inner city young people could never enjoy an opportunity to experience a wilderness adventure. This criticism rightly challenges the potential limitation and usefulness of our thesis to the culturally privileged. Yet we argue that this apparent conflict is at the heart of the missionary problem we are seeking to address in that our objective is to generate strategies and conceptual models to identify, train and sustain leaders from among every socioeconomic genre of young people in the city. As this is a critical issue surrounding our thesis, we will address this potential critique in our project design.

Thus far, in chapter one, we have established the underlying motivation for developing our thesis. In the next chapter (chapter two), we will focus our attention on reviewing pertinent literature regarding Jesus Christ's teaching and training methods. Following this review (in chapter three) we will assess an important body of literature pertaining specifically to experiential learning.

Subsequently, we will present our theological framework in two sections. Chapter four will develop a theological framework for understanding the rhythm of engagement and retreat in Jesus life and ministry. Chapter five will build on the foundation laid in chapter four, and develop a theology of wilderness and apprenticeship for missions. In chapter five we have sought to thoroughly explore the

experiential nature of Jesus Christ's experiential teaching and training methods, and the implications for recruiting, training, sending and sustaining young mission leaders in our cities today. Our theological framework will conclude in chapter five with a proposal for developing outdoor leadership as a strategy for mission.

The project design (chapter six) will then build a practical master plan for developing outdoor-leadership-as-mission in the form of a new mission organization (called Outdoor Leadership International) and an initial ten day training course to train outdoor leaders in the concepts we have developed. We will conclude our study in chapter seven with a review of several outcomes, considerations, and anticipated areas of further study, to fuel further development of a proposed mission structure and its related strategies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE METHODS AND MESSAGE OF JESUS' TEACHING

Methodology: Jesus' Teaching Methods

The Form of Jesus' Teaching (How He Taught)

Forming a *mission community* was Jesus' strategy to penetrate the world with His message. The essence of His message can be found in the inaugural addresses preached at the beginning of His ministry. The Gospel evangelists agree that Jesus' primary message was: "The time has come... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15; Parallel passages: Matt. 4:17, Luke 4:16-21, John 1:12-13). In this chapter we will look at Jesus' message and teaching methods. We will see that His methods for communicating a simple message were as diverse as His audience; thus He employed a wide range of experiential learning techniques to engage His followers. In order to identify the key elements of Jesus' methodology, we will look first at the *form* of teaching followed by the *setting* in which He taught.

Robert Stein analyzes Jesus' style of teaching in, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*. Without the aid of modern day audiovisual materials and props, Jesus was able to capture the attention His audience.¹⁷ By looking at His methods from a linguistic point of view we see that Jesus used many techniques to arouse interest. His use of overstatement, hyperbole, pun, simile, metaphor, proverb, riddle,

¹⁷ Robert Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 7.

paradox, *a fortiori*, irony, parable, questions and humor were the main literary devices He employed to stimulate curiosity. Stein defines these techniques and gives a wide range of passages to illustrate each. Rather than taking a broad view of Jesus' impact on people, Stein breaks apart His teaching and analyzes it critically to show the creative and literary genius of Jesus. Just how interesting was Jesus to His audience? So interesting that at one point, "The crowds simply forgot about their need for food because of their fascination and interest in [His] teaching."¹⁸

How Jesus Motivated His Followers to Learn

Not only did Jesus captivate the imagination of His audience; He also motivated them to change.¹⁹ Jesus created a *thirst for learning* by challenging them to "hear": He asked startling questions, told stories, used visual examples, made uncommon requests like asking the Samaritan woman to give Him a drink (John 4:7), and called people by their name (Luke 10:41, 19:5, 22:31; John 1:42).²⁰

A few years ago, after several hours of hiking, a group of high school young people began to complain to the author of their unbearable thirst. We had been unable to find water due to a summer drought and many of the intermittent streams which usually carried water had disappeared. Finally, late in the afternoon, *as we drew near to a long-awaited stream*, we stopped under a shade tree and read this Psalm: "My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God. When can I go and meet with God (Psalm 42:2)?" Before dropping our packs to wet our parched tongues with cool water, the author made this comment to the group: "Imagine what it would be like if we thirsted for God the same way that we thirst right now for a drink from the stream we hear just

¹⁸ Ibid., 7. The Biblical reference is Mark 6:35-36.

¹⁹ Roy Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 58.

²⁰ Ibid., 158-159.

around the bend?” This is an example of how Jesus motivated His followers. In a similar way, by drawing attention to our physical thirst that day we were able to appreciate the relevance of passages which speak about Jesus as the *Living Water*. Jesus knew the hearts of His audience, and spoke when they were most *thirsty*. To teach as Jesus taught challenges us to bring Kingdom principles to light in the context of *when* our audience is *motivated* to “drink.” We observe quite often that Jesus purposed to *motivate* His listeners first, before offering an invitation to Himself—the Bread and Living Water for which they hungered and thirst.

One way Jesus stirred interest was to *identify needs*. Research has shown that when people wonder about the answer to a question or the solution to a problem their attention is aroused.²¹ And Howard Hendricks asserts one of the best ways to motivate is to “help the learner become aware of his need.”²²

Another way Jesus motivated His disciples was through the use of stories. Robert Morosco comments on the particular wording Jesus used in Matthew’s record of the Great Commission scene. He highlights a story-telling principle as one of the primary factors which motivated Jesus’ audience: “The most effective stories are those that follow the storytelling principle: the greater the unpredictability within a familiar situation, the greater the audience interest generated.”²³ Jesus was the master of drawing people in with surprise and unpredictability.

Jesus also used humor to motivate His disciples. He joked about the logic of putting a lamp under a bowl (Mark 4:21) and throwing pearls to swine (Matt. 7:6).

²¹ Ibid., 161.

²² Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1987), 13.

²³ Robert E. Morosco, “Matthew’s formation of a Commissioning Type-Scene Out of the Story of Jesus’ Commissioning of the Twelve.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 4 (December 1984): 542.

And He told a tale regarding the foolishness of putting a new patch of cloth on an old garment (Matt. 9:15-17). He often said tongue-in-cheek, “He who has ears let him hear” (Matt. 11:15).²⁴ If Jesus spoke this same message to young people today, we might hear Him say: “Would it so dull your life, if for a minute you turned off your *Ipod* and the T.V. and listened to your Maker whisper into your ear?”

Jesus was a master of language in His culture. Speaking in the vernacular language of His region, He drew upon numerous figures of speech to evoke response and action from His followers. A plethora of literature is available regarding Jesus’ literary genius. We will briefly overview examples of the main techniques He used.

Various Literary Devices Used By Jesus

Overstatement

Imagine Jesus making this startling statement: Even natural affection for one’s family must not take precedence over loyalty to Me (Luke 14:26).²⁵ In Mark 9:43-47, Jesus again makes a startling overstatement: There is no sin in life worth perishing over...*Tear out* anything in your life that causes you to sin and keeps you from God.²⁶

Hyperbole

In hyperbole, the illustration given is such a gross exaggeration, that the audience knows it would be impossible to fulfill. For example, to “swallow a camel” (Matt. 23:23-24; Also note: Matt. 5:29-30, Matt. 5:38-42), or to “first take the log out of your own eye” (Matt. 7:3-5) would be impossible to do. Often at the end of a hard

²⁴ Zuck, 204-205.

²⁵ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 8.

day of hiking, we've heard young people say, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

These are strong feelings of hunger expressed in hyperbolic form, and a great opportunity for a timely trail talk. For example, we might remark: "Jesus also had strong feelings too. Sometimes He exaggerated just like us to make a point when He observed hypocrisy and hardness of heart in people." Young people can relate well with this because exaggeration is a normal aspect of adolescent development. And they are equally skilled at hailing hollow hypocrisy.

Pun

Stein defines puns as, "a play on words in which either homonyms (like-sounding words) suggest two or more different meanings or the same word may have two different meanings."²⁷ He cites several examples of puns that Jesus spoke:

1. Matt. 23:23-24: "Jesus' use of the term 'camel' is due to the fact that in Aramaic 'camel' and 'gnat' both look and sound alike. In Aramaic the word for gnat is *galma* and the word for camel is *gamla*. Jesus in his example made a pun. What he said was, 'You blind guides, you strain out a *galma* but turn around and swallow a *gamla*!'
2. Matt. 16:18: "And I say, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church...." In this example *Petros* and *petra* are used for "Peter" and "rock." "In Aramaic, however, the play on words is even more pronounced, since the same term *kepha* served as both the proper name *and* the word for rock." Similarly the name "Stone" today is both a proper name and word for rock.
3. John 3:8: "In Aramaic the word for "wind" and the word for 'Spirit' are the same—*ruha*."
4. Luke 9:59-60: In essence Jesus says, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own physically dead."
5. Mark 1:17 : "Fishing for fish" and "fishing for people"
6. Mark 8:35: "save" and "lose" have physical meaning and spiritual meaning.²⁸

Puns are a powerful tool to cause young people to think: Setting aside time to think is one of the most glaring issues facing young people today... they don't take

²⁶ Ibid., 9.

²⁷ Robert Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 12-13.

time to think and make sense of life. We have learned of the power of puns from a good friend, Dave who is a master with puns. As we spend time with him, we've noticed that he causes us to think more about the everyday matters of life because he speaks puns so readily, keeping us on our toes. Since we know that he likes to use puns, our interest is perked when we are around him so that we can "catch" his puns. Puns make people think; and *they can even help set a tone of learning among a group.*

During a week on the trail, there are numerous opportunities for arousing interest through a well-timed pun. At times we have tried to share a few one along the trail, and then suggest to young people that they think of a pun along the way. It keeps us occupied when the hiking is tough, and it also helps them *be more aware of the journey by trying to find words to express the realities they experience.*

For example, one evening after setting up camp above tree line, we began to cook a pot of noodles for dinner. Our base camp was set at the base of Pyramid Peak in the Weminuche Wilderness Area (Colorado), in preparation to make an ascent to the peak the next morning. In a matter of minutes, dark clouds flooded over the ridge bringing rain, sleet, lightning, and very high winds of nearly one hundred miles per hour. We immediately moved the young people into two rain flies and instructed them to hold on to the sides of the fly so that they would not blow away. We donned our headlamps and placed large rocks around each fly to hold them down. The storm raged for hours; lightning flashed, hail pelted the flies, and it was so windy that we could not boil water to cook the pasta. So all we had to eat was the dessert. At about 3:00 a.m. we heard a "rip" followed by shrill screams in the fly next to us. We rushed out to look, and saw that it had torn in two, and one half of the fly had blown off the mountain. We quickly helped the young people (soggy sleeping bags and all) into the

²⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

other fly; stuffing them in like sardines. Some of the young people (several of whom were very unsure about their belief in Jesus) began to pray and ask God to “save us from the storm!” We made it through the night—each with a handful of fabric in his fist to make sure the fly did not blow away.

The next morning was a prime opportunity to lighten the mood with a pun. While we were sitting in a circle eating our breakfast we said, “Well guys, there is just one word to describe what we went through last night: *In Tents!*” (A play on the word “intense”). This was a light-hearted way to transition into a quiet time to contemplate a storm-passage in Scripture—drawing attention to how they could identify with the disciples who were caught in a furious squall on the Lake of Galilee.

At a different time, very early one morning in the San Juan Mountains, we led a group to a crossing at Ute Creek. The stream spilled out of snow fields high above the valley, and came up to our knees. After teaching the group how to link arms and walk across the stream safely, the author clamored into the middle of the creek to be prepared in case anyone might fall. The group was fearful of the freezing water and the strength of the current. We finally crossed, cold and wet, and sat down to warm up our feet (the author’s legs were as pink as watermelons from the icy stream).

Again, this afforded a teachable moment through a pun:

Well guys, how was that? Did anyone get ‘cold feet?’ Ha, Ha... No, I mean did any of you get ‘cold feet?’ I mean, scared to cross the stream. You know, often in my life, when I face something that is new and risky, I am tempted to get ‘cold feet,’ and avoid going through with it. All of us back at home will face “rivers,” (decisions or opportunities) in our lives that seem scary so we might get ‘cold feet’ and want to give up or go the other way.

There once was a time when God asked His people to ‘cross over’ into the beautiful land He had prepared for them to live.²⁹ His people decided to send out twelve spies to see if there would be any problem going ahead with the plan. When the spies returned, they painted a frightening picture of what lay ahead. They described a land filled with giants who could crush them ‘like

²⁹ This account is described in the book of *Numbers*, Chapters 12-13.

grasshoppers.’ Ten of the spies got ‘cold feet,’ and said they weren’t going to follow through with the plan that God had given them. Only Caleb and Joshua stood up without fear and committed to crossing the river. Well, the people ended up listening to the cowardly ten spies, and because of that decision, none of the people who grumbled against God were allowed to enter in to the Promised Land. Instead, they had to wander around for forty years in a desert. So what do we learn from this? God honors courage when we step out in faith and are willing to take risks to follow Him; like you did in crossing the freezing stream. When we obey Him we are blessed beyond measure. If we are willing to cross through ‘rivers’ and challenges the Lord leads us to, we can be assured that He is with us!

[Then a few days later after we had traveled on over peaks—seeing the beautiful scenery, one could come back to this topic again]: Remember a few days ago when we crossed that raging river? Just think; if we hadn’t crossed over, think of all the beauty and adventure we would have missed. The past couple days have been amazing... we’ve ascended peaks, swam in mountain lakes, enjoyed the warm sun in alpine meadows.... If we had decided not to cross the stream and follow the path, we would have really missed out. I bet once the Israelites eventually obeyed God and went into the Promised Land, crossing the Jordan River they must have regretted all that they had missed because of their disobedience and lack of courage.

Simile

Simile is one of the simplest forms of teaching Jesus used. A simile compares two things that are unlike each other but are connected by the word “like”, “as”, or “than”, or by a verb such as “seems.”³⁰ Stein cites several examples:

Believers are likened to sheep and told to be like serpents in wisdom and like doves in their blamelessness whereas unbelievers are likened to wolves (Matt. 12:40); Jesus’ resurrection is likened to Jonah’s stay in the belly of a sea monster (Luke 17:6); the believer’s faith is likened to a seed (Luke 13:34); Jesus’ desire to gather the people of Jerusalem to himself is likened to a mother hen gathering her chicks to herself (Matt 23:27); and the stately appearance of the Pharisees with their inner spiritual corruption is likened to tombs that outwardly are impressive but inwardly contain corruption (Matt. 23:27-28)!³¹

Here is an example of how we have used similes in the wilderness. Often on the last day of the trip before we re-enter civilization, we stop at a stream and make a

³⁰ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 15.

³¹ Ibid., 15.

“mountain sauna” to clean up before we return. It is amazing how dirty a group of young people can get in just a few days. And the odors are unforgettable. A sauna consists of a rain fly with rocks around the edges to create a seal and a hole in the middle where we put hot rocks from a fire burning several yards away.

Once everyone is seated in the sauna, someone whips the hot rocks with wet pine branches dipped in water to create a steamy, pine-smelling sauna. There is nothing quite like this experience. The hot steam opens the pores of the skin, and the sweat removes the dirt exquisitely. One can top off the experience by running out of the sauna—lunging into a cold stream to wash off the dirt. After slipping on fresh clothes, one truly feels cleansed. This is another teachable moment to illustrate how good it is to be washed of our sins. John writes, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).” After sharing this verse with the group, we might ask the question, “If we are honest, do we believe that we all get this dirty—carrying a similar *odor* of sin?”

The leader might reflect further and give the group an opportunity to think about whether they believe this is an appropriate analogy of sin, and whether they think their sin is a daily offence that needs to be washed away. This could lead into a solo hike where young people are spaced out by themselves, to provide time to confess their sins to the Christ. It could end with a time of either sharing or thanking God for the gift of forgiveness we have in Christ. Thus our bodily odor and the refreshing feeling of the sauna and mountain stream are wonderful similes to describe the reality of un-confessed sin, and the joy of forgiveness.

Metaphor

Metaphors were also common in Jesus’ teaching. He used analogies to provide vivid illustrations *familiar to people*. He used common household terms like;

yeast (Mark 8:15), salt (Matt 5:13; Mark 9:49), light (Matt. 5:14-16), harvest (Matt 9:37-38), snakes (Matt 23:33; Matt. 12:34), and foxes (Luke 13:31-32).³² One of our most vivid illustrations (of the use of a metaphor in the wilderness) occurred during the ascent of a peak one moonlit night in June. The author and his wife awoke a group of eager high school students to ascend a peak in the middle of the night. If we started right away, we could reach the peak by sunrise (which is an unparalleled experience in the backcountry). As we hiked, each participant had to use his headlamp to light the path in front of him to avoid tripping over the rocks. Halfway into the ascent, we stopped and shared Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Several young people were able to draw metaphors from the Psalm relating to the experience of walking in the dark. One of them had a serendipitous realization that God desired him to trust and follow Him as his Guide—who lights his path. He remarked that God gives us *just enough light* to keep us from stumbling but rarely enough light to see *too far* ahead.

We continued climbing for five hours toward the peak. Hiking more efficiently than expected, we reached the summit early: it was pitch-black. The stars were bright and beautiful, but the wind was so cold that we could not stop for long before the sweat on our bodies would chill us—causing hypothermia. The group wanted to wait to see the sunrise, so we clammed down some rocks and tucked ourselves under the cleft of a boulder. We pulled out the emergency sleeping bag, and boiled a pot of hot chocolate. Pressing together tightly kept us sheltered from the wind. The hot chocolate was passed around in a water bottle for each to hold for a few seconds, enjoy a sip, and then share with the next person. We managed to stay

³² Ibid., 15-16.

warm enough; singing, praying, and telling stories, until the sun *finally* came up. And oh, was it worth it!

This experience of *waiting* for the sun to rise in the midst of the cold reminded us of the conversation Jesus had with Peter and the disciples as He comforted them before departing to be with the Father. Jesus said:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. (John 14:1-4)

In a similar way our peak experience was worth every bit of the endurance required to experience the stunning sunrise atop the peak. We too will experience trials of many kinds in life, but we need not be troubled. Whatever trials or suffering we endure is worth it because one day we will meet Jesus (the Bright Morning Star) face to face:

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.... I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star. (Revelation 22:12-14, 16)

Watching the beautiful sunrise atop Pyramid Peak, as stunning as it was, pales in comparison to seeing Jesus, the *Bright Morning Star* at the end of the age.

Proverb

A proverb is best understood as a pithy saying that contains a memorable statement giving moral or ethical advice (cf. Matt 6:22, 24; 7:12; Luke 16:10). According to Charles Carlston and his commentary on Blaise Pascal's understanding of the use of proverbs,

The whole point of proverbial wisdom is the communication of the generally accepted, the universal, the tried and true, not the striking or innovative.... The

challenge of a proverb (if any) thus lies in the realm of action, not thought....
'All the good maxims are already current; what we need is to apply them.'³³

At times proverbs are paradoxical (cf. Mark 4:25; 10:43; Luke 14:11), but in general, they are short and to the point.³⁴ Some of Jesus' proverbs relate to the following topics: 1. A person's heart is where their treasure is (Mt. 6:21), 2. Don't worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:34), 3. If you pick up the sword, you will perish by it, i.e. the spiritual battle is not one of flesh and blood (Mt. 26:52), 4. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (Mk. 3:24), 5. Prophets are given little credibility among their closest friends or family (Mk. 6:4), and 6. The mark of the disciple is not in how one starts the journey, but by how he *continues* and finishes the journey, i.e. if you put your hand to the plow, don't turn back (Luke 9:62).³⁵

Traveling along the trail in the wilderness with young people affords many timely opportunities to share relevant proverbial sayings. There are proverbs that come from Scripture, as well as proverbs that are in the form of quotes or sayings that represent that which is true to life. Contemporary proverbs can come from songs young people listen to on the radio or quotes from famous people they know. Here are a few examples proverbial sayings relevant to the outdoors:

The mountain is not meant to teach us anything, it is meant to make us something.³⁶

While God's glory is written all over His work, in the wilderness the letters are capitalized.³⁷

Any error about creation also leads to an error about God.³⁸

³³ Charles E. Carlton, "Proverbs, Maxims, and the Historical Jesus." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 88-89, Quotation from Pascal, *Pensees* VI: 380.

³⁴ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17ff.

³⁶ Gwen Brahler, Ashley Denton, Greg Fuchs, eds. *Rocky Mountain Region Backcountry Trail/River Reference Manual*, 2001: 15. Quoting Oswald Chambers.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, quoting conservationist John Muir.

³⁸ Editor. "Historical Voices on Learning from Creation." *Green Cross*, April, 1996, Creation Care Publication: 1, quoting Thomas Aquinas.

There are five basic human needs present in survival. They are water, food, heat, shelter, and spiritual needs. Subtract any two of these and the result is likely to be fatal.³⁹

We can also effectively use secular proverbs to open the door for conversation (especially with searching young people), leading to Biblical dialogue:

The roots of education are bitter, but the fruits are sweet.⁴⁰

Make wisdom your provision for the journey from youth to old age; for it is a more certain support than all other possessions.⁴¹

Practice makes perfect.⁴²

One doesn't become [a champion] without sweat.⁴³

To conquer anger is to triumph over one's worst enemy.⁴⁴

The consequences of anger and vexation are often more grievous than their causes.⁴⁵

In a stormy night it is good to let out two anchors from a speedy ship.⁴⁶

Debt reduces the free man to bitter slavery.⁴⁷

A good reputation is safer than money.⁴⁸

You can buy no better thing than a staunch friend.⁴⁹ (This proverb is a good question for young people in terms of considering what makes a good friend.)

It is better to grant favors to another than to enjoy the favors of others.⁵⁰ (This is a good proverb to spark discussion about the nature of servant hood.)

³⁹ Brahler, Denton and Fuchs: 15, quoting *Survival in the Wilderness*.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 92. Aristotle; cited Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, V. 18

⁴¹ Ibid., Bias, cited in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, I.88.

⁴² Ibid., Cited in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, I.99.

⁴² Ibid., *Discourses*, I.xxiv.2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Publilius Syrus, *Sentences*, [B] 87.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 93, Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, XI.18.8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Pindar, Olympian *Odes*, VI.101.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Publilius Syrus, *Sentences*, [A] 11). Cf. Also Eccl 5:9; 7:12; 10:19.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Publilius Syrus, *Sentences*, [B] 75.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 94. Publilius Syrus, *Sentences*, [A].

⁵⁰ Ibid., 100, Bion, cited in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, IV.49.

Riddle⁵¹

From a cold prison cell, John the Baptist realized that his life was coming to a close. When facing one's death it is common to ask weighty questions about the meaning and purpose of his life. In this state of mind, John the Baptist sought a friend's solace. With sincere concern, he sent his disciples away to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else? (Matt. 11:3)." Although one might hope for a display of more *faith* from John the Baptist, we observe from this passage that he was sincerely wondering if he had lived his life in vain. Jesus knew his heart, but He also knew that the people (and John the Baptist) were confused about why He was not initiating the Kingdom of God like the people expected, i.e. in a *forceful way*. With love and respect Jesus sent John's friends back to Him with a riddle:

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been *forcefully advancing*, and *forceful men* lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.⁵²

Jesus' riddle defines reality in terms of the *unseen*. Many envisioned a forceful inauguration of the Kingdom. Yet Jesus' way of war is one of humility, and self-sacrifice. Thus, Jesus responded to John's question with a resounding, "Yes", the battle *is* being won *forcefully* (Matthew 11:12), *but* the conflict is on *His* terms. The Apostle Paul later commented as well on this cosmic quarrel, in a letter to the church at Philippi:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he

⁵¹ This category is identified by Robert Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*. Other riddles can be found in the following verses: Mark 14:58, Luke 13:32b-33, mark 2:19; 9:12-13; Matt. 10:34; 11:11; 24:28; 13:52; 19:12, Luke 22:36; 23:31.

⁵² Italics added.

humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Jesus' riddles had a ringing rhythm of *reveal and conceal*. A.B. Caneday has reflected on this apparent pattern in the riddles of Jesus. The Parable of the Soils provides a poignant example:

Because Jesus' sayings and deeds both reveal and conceal simultaneously, eyes and ears must be vigilantly alert. For Jesus provokes hostility or submissive belief. One will be hardened like the religious officials, or one will become enamored with Jesus as the crowds and fall away quickly under troubles brought on by the gospel, or one will be *choked to unfruitfulness by entanglement in the concerns of the 'things of men'*. Or one will grasp the 'things of God' and be variously fruitful in the gospel.⁵³

The art of outdoor leadership involves awareness and attentiveness to the surroundings and the state of those in the group. This is the essence of shepherd leadership. Learning how to help young people become aware of God's activity and His voice in the world is our aim. And one way Jesus did this was through riddles—His rhythm of *reveal and conceal* caused people to question their true beliefs—which is like taking a seed of the gospel and planting it in the good soil of a humble heart.

Paradox

In paradox, we observe Jesus saying things that appear contradictory. Often Jesus' paradoxical statements were perceived as contradictions, because of the audience's false understanding of the principles of the Kingdom of God. According to Narry Santos, "A paradox is an apparently self-contradictory statement, containing

⁵³ A.B. Caneday, *He Wrote in Parables and Riddles: Mark's Gospel as a Literary Reproduction of Jesus' Teaching Method*. Orlando: Evangelical Theological Society Papers. Theological Research Exchange Network, 50th National Conference, 37. Italics added.

truth that reconciles conflicting opposites.⁵⁴ For example, Mark 9:35 reads as a paradox: “Whoever wants to be first shall be last.” Santos remarks, “Jesus’ teaching, model, and death remind His followers not to hold back service from the very people whom he served.”⁵⁵ Today we are challenged to consider a similarly remarkable paradox: *How are we justified in holding back service from some people (i.e. our lack of mission-commitment to un-reached peoples)—who are the very people whom Jesus served through His death on the cross?* This is precisely the reason why we assert the need for thoughtful dialogue regarding how to promote catalytic leadership among the youth mission fields of our day.

Other selected examples of paradoxes include: The greatest versus the least in the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:43), the Pharisees who looked good on the outside but were like tombs on the inside (Matt. 23:27-28), and the Widow’s mite (Mark 12:41-44). Pertaining to the widow, Stein remarks:

Despite the apparent contradiction, the gift of a penny was greater in God’s sight than the much larger sums contributed by the rich, and the beautiful veneer of dress and outward piety of the Pharisees and scribes, who were the religious leaders of Israel, was at variance with the inner corruption and spiritual poverty.⁵⁶

We also observe Jesus’ life itself being a paradox, as the King of Israel lived the life of a servant (Mark 10:14, 31, 45).

Rock climbing has been a powerful tool to help young people learn about God, themselves, and the spiritual life. It powerfully illustrates the use of metaphor and paradox. Climbing the rock is like the journey of life. From the base of a rock face, it appears impossible to climb. But with the appropriate equipment and a competent

⁵⁴ Narry F. Santos, “Jesus’ Paradoxical Teaching in Mark 8:35; 9:35; and 10:43-44.” *Bibliotheca sacra* 625, no. 157 (January-March 2000): 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

*belayer*⁵⁷, the climber is assured he can make it. The analogy is simple: The *belayer* at the top of the rock is like God. The rope is like Jesus Christ, and our decision to hook in to the rope with a *carabiner*⁵⁸ is analogous to our decision to surrender our lives to Christ, trusting Him completely. If a person were to try to climb a difficult pitch without a rope (analogous to journeying through life without a relationship with Jesus) then he would most assuredly fall to his death. But if he clips into the rope (analogous to making a decision to trust and believe in Jesus Christ) he is safe to climb—the *belayer* (analogous to God) promises to hold him.

Yet reaching the top of a rock does not happen without one's own effort. The Heavenly Father enables us, anchors us, and encourages us, but He also desires our best effort: *There is an inseparable relationship between work and trust for the climber.* In a paradoxical way, we are *safe to risk* with God. Rock climbing *models the tension of man's responsibility and God's sovereignty in an experiential and memorable way.* Coleman agrees in principle: “In the spiritual dimension of reality, we must believe in order to see. Hence, those who do not trust Christ cannot possibly understand His claims, they are blind. This is the great tragedy of sin.”⁵⁹

When climbing, young people wear a helmet at all times. One of the safety practices we teach is what to do if an object (a rock or water bottle, etc.) falls down the rock. Paradoxically, one's natural instinct when someone yells “rock” from above is to step back and run away from the object. Yet the safest action to take is to *run toward the face of the rock and lean into it.* The closer one is to the rock face, the safer he is, because the falling object will bounce over his head. This paradox has

⁵⁷ A *belayer* is the person who pulls the rope as the climber climbs, insuring that if the climber were to fall, the *belayer* would lock off the rope so that the climber will only fall a few inches. The *belayer* serves to encourage the climber to keep climbing and not give up as well as providing the equipment and expertise to stop the climber from falling should he or she lose their footing while climbing.

⁵⁸ A *carabiner* is a metal clip that allows the climber to hook the rope into his harness to protect him from falling.

parallels to one's spiritual journey. As we are climbing the "rock of life", we will experience fear. Yet, even though our instinct is to turn and run, the safest posture to take is to face our fears and squeeze closely against the Rock, Jesus Christ. When we encounter a difficult situation, we may be tempted to run away from the Body of Christ. Yet, the spiritual weapons He gives us (listed in Ephesians 6) are meant to help us *stand* against the enemy rather than run away from him.

This paradox relates similarly to the *spiritual disciplines* in that they are used to train our bodies and minds to act in ways which go against the inclination of our flesh. In Christ we are enabled to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.... (Titus 2:12)." Likewise we are called to have our minds "controlled by the Spirit" (Romans 8:6); which results in "life and peace" rather than being controlled by the flesh which results in death. The spiritual disciplines are ways to train ourselves to be controlled by the Spirit so we can *lean into* the spiritual battle.

A Fortiori

A fortiori is a statement intended to elicit natural agreement among the audience.⁶⁰ Essentially it is an argument from common sense. For example, Robert Stein observes that in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses this line of reasoning:

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, thought you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more you're your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!⁶¹

⁵⁹ Coleman, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism*, 89-90. See also John 9:1-38.

⁶⁰ Knowles, 291.

⁶¹ Ibid., 20.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus undoubtedly drew many illustrations from the surrounding hills and meadows. Matthew records Jesus arguing *a fortiori* against the backdrop of the wilderness:

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:28-30)

Sending out the Twelve Apostles, Jesus used a similar line of reasoning to prepare them for the sting of rejection and persecution which they would inevitably face. Referring to the religious leaders who would surely try to hand these young men over to the local councils (Matt. 10:17), Jesus reminded them of how he had already been treated by these same men: “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household” (Matthew 6:28-30)! Stein sheds further light on this leadership principle *a fortiori*: “If Jesus’ authority and influence were not enough to protect him from persecution, how much more will his followers who have less authority and influence be persecuted?”⁶²

In the paired parables of the Tower Builder and the Warring King (Luke 14:28-33) we see that *a fortiori* is a statement intended to elicit natural agreement among the audience to make palatable a piercing rebuke following the *a fortiori*. Michael Knowles comments:

The question ‘Who among you?’ is intended to elicit agreement from the hearer *a fortiori*—that is, given the logical necessity of the anticipated response, how much more, by implication, must the legal or spiritual corollary apply.⁶³

⁶² Ibid., 21.

⁶³ Knowles, 291.

Regarding the first parable of the Tower Builder, the audience agrees: “Don’t advance unless there are sufficient resources.” The audience also agrees *a fortiori* with a second statement in the Parable of the Warring King: “Don’t go to war unless you know you can win.” Again, we would all agree to this wisdom. Yet, following this line of agreement, Jesus then asks two penetrating questions: 1) Can you afford to follow me? And 2) Can you afford *not* to follow me? Thus the surprise of Jesus’ statement is this: Either following Him, or *refusing to follow Him*, costs one’s whole life either way!⁶⁴

Jesus expects His disciples to renounce all and follow Him. The issue facing His hearers (and Luke’s readers) is not one of risk management. Rather, losing all appears to be unavoidable in any case: “The only question is whether one will lose all as a follower of Jesus and for the sake of God’s reign, or as one who refuses to follow and obey.”⁶⁵

Asking Questions⁶⁶

Constructing simple questions that cause people to think is not an easy task, yet Jesus was a master at asking well-crafted questions. During the Sermon on the Mount, He asked the crowd, “If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again (Matt. 5:13)?”⁶⁷ On the outskirts of Caesarea Philippi (a city named after Caesar who claimed the status of deity), Jesus asked His disciples a poignant *question regarding their loyalty*. First He asked them who *the people* thought He was. It is

⁶⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁶⁵ Knowles, 294.

⁶⁶ Zuck, in his previously cited book, *Teaching as Jesus Taught*, lists several passages to illustrate Jesus’ method of asking questions: Mark 8:19-20; 10:38, Matt. 17:25, 21:31, Luke 10:36; 22:35, Mark 3:1-4, Mark 11:27-33, Mark 2:6-9, 19, 25-26; 3:23-24; 10:3, 37-39; 12:14-16, Matt 12:27-29, Matt. 12:11-12, Luke 7:39-42; 13:15-16; 14:1-5. Zuck also has many helpful tables, including Questions Jesus Used in Concluding and Applying Parables and Illustrations (p. 250-51), Questions Jesus asked (258).

easier to discuss first what “others” think of Jesus—this provides a non-threatening starting point. But then Jesus probed deeper and asked *the Disciples*, “Who do you say that I am? (Mark: 8:27-32).”⁶⁸ Peter responded courageously that Jesus was the Messiah. This simple yet crafted line of questioning regarding loyalties created space for Peter to express his belief that Jesus was the Son of God.

Thus according to the Scriptures, Jesus’ thoughtful questioning often *creates space for verbal and personal commitment to Him*. Here are a few examples of the way Jesus accomplished this through carefully crafted questions: “What do you want? (John 1:38)”, “Will you give me a drink? (John 4:7)”, “What are you discussing as you walk along? (Luke 24:17)”, and “Friends, haven’t you any fish? (John 21:5)” are a few examples.⁶⁹ Later in our study we will discuss the implications of how asking questions is an important skill for outdoor leaders to develop in order to prayerfully create space for young people to consider their belief in Jesus Christ.

Often, Jesus used questions to prod for an *opinion* or an *expression of desire*. For example: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? (Matt. 6:27).” Zuck asserts, by phrasing this in the form of a question, it “conveys the point more forcefully than a mere declaration such as, ‘No one of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life.’”⁷⁰ Or, when Jesus asked the blind man, “Do you believe that I am able to do this (Matt. 9:28)?” he was pushing for an expression of faith.⁷¹ Again, He pressed for an expression of faith from His disciples by asking, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat (John 6:5)?”⁷²

⁶⁷ Zuck, 244.

⁶⁸ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 23.

⁶⁹ Zuck, 242.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 242.

⁷¹ Ibid., 243.

⁷² Ibid., 244.

Jesus often used *rhetorical questions* to motivate thinking *without putting the hearer on the spot* to provide an answer. This non-threatening technique allowed people to see their error without unnecessary embarrassment. His rhetorical questions typically evoked the audience to *compare the Kingdom of God to the world*.⁷³

Asking relevant questions is truly an art. We can easily miss an opportunity to engage and draw out true seekers by asking *thoughtless* questions, and it may cause defensiveness rather than openness. For instance, it is common in leading Bible studies to ask questions which are subtly looking for a specific/right answer. So if young people do not have confidence that what they have to share is “right”, they are likely to avoid participating in the discussion. An *inductive* approach to dialogue is more beneficial in helping young people discover for themselves the truth of a passage. This approach seeks to craft questions which are open-ended (i.e. not yes/no). The following section provides examples of well-crafted questions with non-threatening words to create an atmosphere of openness with young people. In the following examples, we will note in *italics*, key words which promote dialogue.

Observation Questions

Observation questions are a starting point in the inductive study process. For instance we might begin with questions that ask for a *list*, or to *identify* facts in the passage. One subtle way to draw participants into the discussion is to use open-ended words like “some.” For example a good observation question for a study of Mark 2:1-12 might be: “According to the passage, *list some* of the people who are in this story. What are *some* of the things we learn about each of them?” These are non-threatening because they are open-ended, and anyone may answer the questions with a degree of

⁷³ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 24. Illustrations: 1. Comparing the Kingdom of God to the world; (Mark 4:30), 2. How salt loses its saltiness; (Mark 9:50), and 3. How the Heavenly Father's love is

confidence. Negatively, if we had asked, “From the passage, who are the people in the story? What do we learn about each of them?” there would have been considerably more silence in the group because few young people want to be wrong in front of their peers by answering questions which are looking for a “right” answer. The difference in a good question is very subtle as illustrated above. Our goal is that young people are able discover the *true meaning of the text (i.e. the “right” answers)*, yet we are most effective when we ask questions which *enable personal discovery*.

Interpretation Questions

Leading the study further, considering the *interpretation* of the text, we would follow the same pattern. These questions explore the “why” behind the passage. Yet the word “why” is a very threatening word because it implies there is only one right answer, and it pushes for personal commitment. So we must appropriate the presentation of questions containing the word “why.” With interpretation questions we are hoping to help young people discover the *significance of any observations* they have made in the text, towards and understanding of the *author’s original intended meaning*. Words like “might”, “what”, and “some” are helpful in making questions more open-ended. For example, using the same passage above, we might ask: “From the passage, *what* are *some* reasons why Jesus *might* have spoken to the paralyzed man about sin before dealing with his physical need? *What reasons* do we think Jesus *might have had* to heal the man?” This question allows for young people to explore what *some* of the reasons *might* have been... even if they have little conception as to what His reasons really were. This highlights the art of questioning. A leader must have *confidence* that it is okay for young people to explore *probable meanings* in

order to discover the *true meaning* as we artfully guide the discussion. A close-ended example to the question that would likely inhibit a young person from entering a dialogue would have been: “From the passage, why does Jesus speak to the paralyzed man about sin before dealing with his physical need? Why does He heal the paralyzed man?” These are questions that look for one “right” answer. If a young person is afraid his answer might be wrong, he will usually keep silent, which truncates the searching process.

Practical Application Questions

Finally, if we wanted to lead a group into a *practical application of the text*, we would follow the same principles. In *application questions*, the leader is working to help the group identify how to build the truths of the text into their lives. These questions probe what the passage says about God, about people, about sin, etc. A good application question will help group members integrate the personal meaning and relevance of the text into their *personal lives* as well as to some form of *corporate application*. For example (using the same passage), we might ask the following questions to promote a relevant application: “From the passage, Jesus talks about His ability to forgive sins. Do *we* think that forgiveness of sins is a need that *people* have today? How *might* you have experienced this need in your life? In *what ways* has forgiveness been important to you?”

We would entertain an entirely different response if the questions were asked in this manner: “From the passage, Jesus talks about His ability to forgive sins. Is forgiveness of sins a need that *people* have today? Why or Why not? Is this a need you experience in your life? How, if ever, has forgiveness been important to you?” Again the differences are almost unnoticeable at first glance in all of these examples, but the responses will be vastly different. We have experimented with both forms of

questions and observed the contrast between productive discovery (due to well-crafted questions, i.e. open-ended), versus complete paralysis (due to thoughtless questions, i.e. closed-ended).

Responding to Questions

Jesus not only asked questions, but He often *answered* questions of those who were inquisitive. The way Jesus answered questions often revealed true seekers: Thus, finding out *why* the inquirer wants to know the answer to the question is the key to their transformation. For instance, if a young person asks in a group discussion, “How can we really know that the Bible is true?” we might respond, “First let us discuss *why we want to know* if the Bible is true?” This exposes the motive of the questioner. Often young people ask questions to keep a distance; Jesus often returned questions with a question to lovingly reveal their true motive—winsomely drawing them to Himself.

Irony

Irony is another powerful figure of speech that Jesus employed. According to Stein: “... irony is the subtle use of contrast between what is actually stated and what is more or less wryly suggested.... In this narrow sense, a statement or expression is ironic when its intended meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning of the statement.”⁷⁴ For example, Stein comments, “The Pharisees and the Sadducees, although religious, are able to interpret the physical signs and predict their implications but are unable to see God’s signs in the ministry of Jesus and interpret their significance (Matt. 16:2-3, Luke 12:16-20).”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 21.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

Crafting an ironic statement that has relevance with young people requires observing *what young people value* i.e. the energy they expend on the things they love. This shows the irony of what they value in the world compared to an investment of the same passion, time, and energy into efforts of *eternal* significance.

For example, we might consider how much time young people spend playing *Xbox*, or *Nintendo*, etc. Video games often captivate the minds of young people every day. They are *enticed by the adventure and the chance to win against a formidable enemy* who is seeking to defeat them. It is ironic that young Christians will spend hours learning how to play a video game in order to conquer an imaginary enemy, yet they lack the desire or discipline to spend even five minutes a week in focused prayer; which is the doorway into the realm of the spirit where the real battle rages on. Young people in the Two-Third's world may not struggle with video games, but we have observed the same preoccupation with jacks, marbles, and soccer, as well as addictive fascinations with gangs and youth militias (like Maoist youth in Nepal).⁷⁶

The battle in the spiritual realm is real, the stakes are high—it is not a game. The powers of darkness seek to defeat and distract young people from experiencing abundant life in Christ. If this irony was presented to young people in a compelling, non-judgmental way, they might catch on to the *real* and exciting adventure that awaits them in following Jesus Christ. We are invited by Jesus to an exciting and courageous journey—much more compelling than the computer-generated adventures available through an *Xbox*, or the *disparaging identity gained from giving one's strength and creativity to a violent gang or youth militia*.

⁷⁶ The author was in Nepal (September 2006) developing an indigenous youth work initiative. One of the Nepali leaders (to remain unnamed) shared how the Maoist Youth had endeavored to recruit her (recognizing her leadership abilities), necessitating her escape from her village to a larger city in order to flee their harmful recruiting tactics.

We have observed that when young people retreat for several days in the wilderness, they enjoy a taste of *real* life, and the distractions of the world lose their grip. They often discover irony in their lives, i.e. *what they actually value* compared too that which has eternal significance. It is important to follow up with young people after a wilderness experience, so that they continue to see the futility of the games the world has to offer compared to the riches that we have in Christ: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3).”

Jesus’ telling of the Parable of the Persistent Neighbor (found in Luke 11:33ff) provides a cogent example of how He used this figure of speech to uncover an accurate understanding of God’s character. Kenneth Bailey comments:

When you go to this kind of neighbor everything is against you. It is night. He is asleep in bed. The door is locked. His children are asleep. He does not like you and *yet* you will receive even more than you ask. This is because your neighbor is a man of integrity and he will not violate that quality. The God to whom you pray also has an integrity that he will not violate; and beyond this, he loves you.⁷⁷

Herman Waitjen adds:

Since the sleeper is not motivated on the basis of friendship, the petitioner is confronted with the dishonor of being unable to offer hospitality to his midnight guest. In fact, his dishonor may be compounded in the eyes of his visitor by his neighbor’s refusal to observe the reciprocity of village friendship. His only recourse is to resort to conduct that will succeed in acquiring the bread he needs to offer hospitality to his unexpected visitor. The irony is that he must become shameless in order to save his honor.⁷⁸

The irony is that although *shamelessness* is regarded as dishonorable, one must become *shameless* in order to *save his honor!* This begs the question, “In what ways do we shamelessly petition for others in order to *save our honor?*” Do we have

⁷⁷ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999, 133.

the integrity to *shamelessly* seek the Lord on behalf of others? As we consider the implications of this ironic parable, we quickly discern its mission-application in terms of our responsibility as ambassadors of Jesus. We are called to identify needs among people groups; exercising integrity by prayerfully seeking how the Lord might urge us to plead with others to join us in missions to serve those in need. Secondly, if we are in the position of the “neighbor,” we must not ignore the petitioner otherwise we become dishonorable in the ways of the Kingdom. If we avoid becoming *shameless for the sake of the lost*, then we become shameful in the ways of the Kingdom.⁷⁹ This parable asks the hearer, “Is your integrity in question when it comes to your role in missions?” According to this parable, becoming shameless in one’s petitioning will help restore integrity in regard to his responsibility in missions.

Humor

We find through Jesus’ use of humor that followers of Christ who are gifted in humor may have a unique role in missions to help other leaders remember that if they take themselves too seriously they will likely experience personal turmoil and miss opportunities for *missiological breakthrough*. Jesus used humor with precise timing when the disciples were at critical breakthrough moments. For example, on the heels of the earth-shattering Mount of Transfiguration experience an argument arose among the disciples about which one of them would be the greatest. Luke’s account conveys how Jesus recognized this as a breakthrough moment and used humor to achieve His goal. Luke records:

⁷⁸ Herman C. Waetjen, "The Subversion of "World" by the Parable of the Friend at Midnight." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 4, no. 120 (2001): 713.

⁷⁹Ibid., 721. Waitjen again clarifies: “To be charged with shamelessness is to be implicated in disgraceful behaviour (p. 714). Quoting the church father, John Chrysostom (*De caeco et Zaechaeo* 59.601.42-46), Waetjen writes, ‘Knowing that shamelessness is good for godliness, for if for property many are shameless, for salvation of the soul is it not best to put on the good shamelessness’?

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.’ (Luke 9:47-48)

Johan Hovelynck and Luk Peeters have seen this humor-principle at work regarding the role of humor in outdoor experiences with young people: “As far as timing is concerned, humor seems most beneficial when participants are close to a breakthrough.”⁸⁰ According to observations among outdoor experience participants, humor brings a new perspective to tense situations like the, “Who among us is the greatest,” example mentioned above.

Describing the phenomenon of uttering a joke into a petulant situation, they write: “In this respect, the irritated [person] and the joking [person] have similar concerns. Both are probing how safe it is to address more personal matters in the group”⁸¹ They continue:

Our exploration reveals some beneficial as well as unwanted aspects of humor in adventure education. First, we argued that humor may play a positive role in developing relationships that are conducive to learning about self and one’s identity in relation to others. It tends to support the initial contact in the earlier stages of group development, in later stages provides a means to test the grounds for further disclosure and carefully explore more personal communication without becoming overly vulnerable, and represents a rather innocent form of coping with counter-dependency. Second, humor can contribute to the learning process itself as it may, one, facilitate a workable distance to more sensitive learning issues and, two, present new and unexpected perspectives that dislodge old, restrictive frames.⁸²

Jesus presented new perspectives and dislodged restrictive frames particularly during the Sermon on the Mount. Here is one of Jesus’ sayings which is easily applied on a wilderness journey:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand,

⁸⁰ Johan Hovelynck and Luk Peeters, "Laughter, Smiles and Grins: The Role of Humor in Learning and Facilitating." *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 3, no. 2 (2003): 181.

⁸¹ Ibid., 178.

⁸² Ibid., 181.

and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

One can imagine how humorous and unintelligent it would be to keep his flashlight shining in a pocket while walking in the darkness. In the wilderness, the necessity of light is more pronounced: Putting one's flashlight in a pocket while stumbling down a dark path lacks common sense. An application of this humorous interlude might be: "If we rarely shine and share Jesus in our arena of influence at home isn't this also as senseless as putting a flashlight in a pocket at night? Have we been deceived to believe this is an acceptable pattern in our lives at home in the city?" E.A. Russell agrees in regard to the humorous quality of this metaphor and its power to cause followers of Jesus to take the "flashlight" out of their pockets and use it for its purpose: "...any sane person would [not] put a lamp under a bushel. But such a humorous picture of stupidity helps to underline the folly of the disciple of Jesus who refuses to bear witness."⁸³

Confronting these types of well-worn paths of disobedience and deceit can be challenging for a leader. For this reason, though, humor has at times a paramount role in speaking the obvious while keeping the audiences hearts open through laughter. A principle we find to be true is: *One will likely accept as true that which makes him laugh.* In other words, "...Humor provides a testing ground for more direct communication about emotionally laden issues."⁸⁴

⁸³ E.A. Russell, "Some Reflections on Humour in Scripture and Otherwise," *Irish Biblical Studies*, no. 13 (October 1991): 208.

⁸⁴ Hovelynch and Peeters, 178.

Parables and Parabolic or Figurative Actions

Defining Parabolic Teaching

Probably the most commonly recognized figure of speech Jesus used while teaching was the parable. A wide body of literature is available regarding the purposes and interpretations of parables. In this section we will look primarily at how scholars define and categorize Jesus' parables. First, what *is* a parable? A concise definition is provided by C.H. Dodd, in his classic work, *The Parables of the Kingdom*:

At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.⁸⁵

Richard Trench, whose *Notes on the Parables* may be the most widely cited work on the parables,⁸⁶ illustrates: "Each one of the parables is like a casket, itself of exquisite workmanship, but in which jewels richer than itself are laid up; or like fruit, which, however lovely to look upon, is yet more delectable in its inner sweetness."⁸⁷ Trench's work provides commentary on each of the parables—describing the context, content, and application of the parables to their original audience.

It is also helpful to note what a parable *is not*. It differs from fable, myth, proverb, and allegory. Archbishop Trent clarifies:

The parable differs from the fable, by moving in a spiritual world, and never transgressing the actual order of natural things—from the myth, because in that there is an unconscious blending of the deeper meaning with the outward symbol, the two remaining separate in the parable—from the proverb, inasmuch as it is longer carried out, and not merely accidentally but necessarily figurative—from

⁸⁵ C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1961), 5.

⁸⁶ Herbert Lockyer et al., *All the Parables of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 9. "Dr. Cosmo Lang, for example, in the preface of his most helpful volume on The Parables of Jesus, tells us that Trench's work was the only one he consulted as he prepared his own book...."

⁸⁷ Richard Trench, *Notes on the Parables* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1948), 15.

the allegory, by comparing one thing *with* another, and not transferring, as the allegory, the properties of one *to* the other.⁸⁸

There is a distinct difference between a parable and an allegory. The parable is more of a full-length story that usually illustrates a single point: “The details are not intended to have independent significance. In an allegory, on the other hand, each detail is a separate metaphor, with a significance of its own.”⁸⁹

Jesus took great care in anchoring His parables to what was commonly known by the audience. He began with what people knew from experience; then expanded the story to evoke understanding of a spiritual reality that was either dulled or unknown to the hearers. To be an effective teacher, one’s language must be fresh, yet it must begin where the hearer can understand:

For while all language is more or less figurative, yet long use has worn out the freshness of the stamp, so that, to create a powerful impression, language must be cast into novel forms, as was done by our Saviour. He gave no doctrine in an abstract form, no skeleton of truth, but clothed them all, as it were, with flesh and blood. He acted Himself as He declared to His apostles they must act (Matt 13:52); He brought forth out of His treasure things new and old; by the help of the old, making intelligible the new. And thus in His own example He has given us the secret of all effectual teaching.⁹⁰

Michael Knowles, in his article, *Challenge of Jesus' parables*, agrees with Trench’s point:

...the compelling appeal of parables, however, derives from the fact that their familiarity—dealing with such common matters as farmers, rulers, seeds and weeds—is often confounded by unexpected reversals or outcomes. The listener (or reader) is drawn by the power of a good story, only then to discover that the narrative leads him or her in unexpected directions or to unanticipated conclusions.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁹ Dodd, 7.

⁹⁰ Trench, 11.

⁹¹ Knowles, 286.

Familiarity is a key aspect of culture. Although generalizations are an approximation of the truth, we can say from our own experience in cross-cultural missions that when one thinks about the foundation of any culture, *that which is most familiar to a person has a profound influence on his cultural viewpoint*. Thus we learn from Jesus' example that: 1) Learning to speak of the familiar is of primary importance for cross-cultural communication, and 2) understanding the Scriptures and having the ability to draw the audience into dialogue through what is familiar (prayerfully crafting ways to speak words of life through the unexpected) is a skill worth learning in our craft of "catching" men.

The goal of Jesus' parables was clearly to evoke a response *toward* the Kingdom of God. T.W. Manson, in his work, *The Teachings of Jesus* asserts:

[The parable] depends for its effectiveness not primarily on its excellence as an illustration, as we are so prone to imagine, but on the responsiveness of those to whom it is addressed. [For example] The power of Nathan's parable lies not in the story itself, though that is sufficiently apt, but in the spontaneous moral indignation of David: and it is on that moral response to the story that everything subsequently hinges. The seeing eye and the hearing ear and the understanding heart are essential if the parable is to do its proper work.⁹²

Manson's view highlights the observation noted in the introduction of our thesis, that contemporary teaching paradigms which put the weight of their emphasis on the excellence of the communication (i.e. the *methods* and *content*), rather than on *setting, timing, and the responsiveness of the hearer*, often fall short of the objective that Jesus had in His teaching, i.e. to promote practical application. This assertion will be developed further in the proceeding section exploring the *settings* of Jesus' teaching.

Parables also act as *a preservative for spiritual truth in an ever-changing world*. Cosmo Lang, notes that parabolic teachings by design preserve the truth because they are tethered to *timeless, observable principles found in the natural*

realm: "...Mere words are constantly changing their meaning, whereas the symbols of life and nature, such as our Lord used in His parables, are as abiding as Nature and Life themselves."⁹³

Although parabolic teaching arouses thought, stirs affections, arrests and holds the attention an audience,⁹⁴ ultimately *the fruit of the well-aimed parable is that it reveals true seekers*. True seekers came to Jesus to ask questions after hearing a parable they perceived related to them. Herbert Lockyer, whose compendium resource, *All the Parables of the Bible*, cites James Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*: Parables sometimes withdraw the light from those who love darkness. They protect the truth which they enshrine from the mockery of the scoffer. They leave something with the careless which may be interpreted and understood afterwards. They reveal, on the other hand, seekers after truth.⁹⁵

Categories of Parables

Many scholars have labored to understand Jesus' use of parables through categorizing them into patterns. A.B. Bruce systematically divides Jesus' parables into three categories; 1) theoretical parables, 2) parables of grace, and 3) parables of judgment. Bruce makes an important contribution in his commentary in relation to Jesus' familiarity with His audience.⁹⁶ He makes two critical observations: *Jesus knew the state of being of His audience, and He knew the world in which they lived*. He asserts that good teaching is first motivated by a keen understanding of the group's state of being—the issues that are hindering them from following God. As a result, Jesus was able to draw from the surrounding context to provide visual or emotionally laden word pictures to illustrate life-changing principles the audience needed to

⁹² T.W. Manson, *The Teachings of Jesus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), 65-66.

⁹³ Lockyer, 18.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 17-18.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 17.

hear.⁹⁷ This highlights an important hermeneutical caution for outdoor leaders seeking to use the outdoor setting to apply Biblical truth. An outdoor leader might mistakenly focus on a nature-illustration *first* (which are copiously available in the outdoors), rather than the state of being of his audience. Yet we learn that Jesus crafted His illustrations *in the context of a keen awareness of the state of being of His audience*. In our review of Bruce's perspective on the parables, it is important to mention that although Bruce's study is strong in the area of context, a potential fault in his work is identified by Archibald Hunter in *Interpreting the Parables*:

Bruce's faults are those of a man of his time—he is liberal, and so tends to think of the Kingdom of God as Divine Commonwealth and to talk of 'the sweet reasonableness of Jesus' ... but he brings a true breath of Galilee back into the study of parables.⁹⁸

With a slightly different approach to categorizing the parables, Robert Zuck, identifies the following patterns: 1. God's reign, 2. God's character, 3. God's disciples, 4. God's enemies, and 5. God's judgment.⁹⁹ Regardless of how the parables might be categorized, it appears that all of them stem out of the central message of Jesus' inaugural speeches ("Repent...for the Kingdom of Heaven is near...") announcing the reign of the Kingdom of God.¹⁰⁰ These speeches illustrated in clear language: 1. The character of the King, 2. The nature of His Son, and 3. The characteristics of the Kingdom. *This pattern found in the parables and Jesus' inaugural speeches is a helpful guide in crafting the Biblical content for a wilderness journey.* These timeless themes provide a simple guide for initiating profound dialogue with young people.

⁹⁶ A.B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ; A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of our Lord* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1882), 23.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁸ Archibald Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 37.

⁹⁹ Zuck, 321.

Not only did Jesus speak parables to evoke a response from true seekers, but He Himself was a *living* parable. Throughout the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures we see this *incarnational* principle at work, i.e. how God sometimes uses men and women to *be* a parable so that the true seekers can *see* the message, in addition to hearing it. Other researchers have learned that retention heightens when people *see* something modeled. For instance, a report published by *Xerox Corporation* some years ago revealed that 83% of what we learn comes through our *sight*.¹⁰¹ As an illustration of this point, when Jesus meets Zacchaeus and walks *with* him to his house, His *action* is a figurative parable. His behavior must be understood as a prophetic action and sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God...for the forgiveness of God is now offered *even* to tax collectors (who were regarded as “sinner” types in first century Jewish culture).¹⁰²

We have several examples of figurative parables in the Hebrew Scriptures. The book of Hebrews explains the figurative nature of the Levitical constitution, i.e. the outer court and Jesus’ atoning sacrifice.¹⁰³ The wanderings of the children of Israel can also be considered a parable of life.¹⁰⁴ Trench identifies Abraham (the casting out of Hagar), Jonah, and David (his agony in Psalm 22 as a Messianic foreshadowing) as parabolic persons in the Old Testament.¹⁰⁵ And God also called

¹⁰⁰ Jesus’ inaugural messages can be found in the following Gospel accounts: Mark 1:15, Matthew 4:17; 5:1-12, Luke 4:16-21, John 1:12-13.

¹⁰¹ Zuck, 176. “Hearing provides for 11 percent of what we learn, compared with extremely small percentages from the other three senses: smell, 3.5 percent, touch 1.5 percent, and taste, 1 percent.”

¹⁰² Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, 25 (cf. Luke 15:1-32, Luke 19:1-6: Stein categorizes this encounter as a figurative parable in light of Matt 11:5 which implies that Jesus knew who Zacchaeus was before He met him... He knew his action in going to have a meal at Zacchaeus’ house would model His message that He came for the sick who needed a doctor, etc.).

¹⁰³ Trench, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 12.

some of His servants to teach others through an *acted* parable. Some examples include Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Peter.¹⁰⁶

Variation and Participation: How Jesus Involved His Disciples

Another recognizable feature of Jesus' teaching method was His effort to vary teaching as well as to motivate His listeners to *participate* in order to heighten learning. Jesus *varied* His teaching in some of the following ways: Lecturing¹⁰⁷, discussing, questioning, answering, offering brief statements, initiating conversations which involved the element of surprise, telling stories or parables, demonstrating, quoting, asserting maxims, offering challenges, rebuking, commenting, telling riddles, arguing, and remaining silent.¹⁰⁸ People tend to learn when they apply and *do* what they learn. Robert Zuck provides a list of some of the ways Jesus initiated participation in order to promote learning:

1. The Disciples climbed in a boat while He taught (Mark 3:9).
2. The Disciples baptized converts (John 4:2).
3. He sent the disciples to nearby Samaritan town (not a town they were familiar) to buy food (John 4:8).
4. He told a demon-possessed man to go tell his family of his healing (Mark 5:19).
5. He sent twelve groups of twos to exorcise demons, heal the sick, preach, and teach (Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6) with detailed instructions (Matt 10:5-40).
6. He had the disciples report their ministry (Mark 6:30, Luke 9:10) and then took them away for a retreat (Mark 6:31-32; Luke 9:10).
7. He directed the disciples to have five thousand sit in groups (Matt: 14:19-20).
8. He took Peter, James and John with him to the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1).
9. He told Peter to catch a fish and take a coin out of its mouth (Matt. 17:27).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 11-12: Jeremiah; breaks the potter's wheel (19:1-11), wears a yoke (27:2, 28:10), redeems a field in pledge (32:6-15). Also note Peter's vision (Acts 10:9-16) and Jesus as the incarnation (John 1:14).

¹⁰⁷ Zuck, 166. He notes that Jesus' lectures moved from "the known to the unknown." Examples of the illustrations Jesus used during lectures can be found on p. 168 in his Table about Jesus' use of Nature in teaching.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 166.

10. He sent messengers into Samaritan village to prepare accommodations (Luke 9:52).
11. He commissioned 72 in groups of twos to go heal sick and preach (Luke 10:1-17).
12. He sent two disciples to Bethpage to get a colt for Him to ride (Matt. 21:1-3)
13. He sent His disciples to prepare the Passover Meal (Matt. 26:17-19).
14. He commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20).
15. He commanded Peter to feed his sheep (John 21:15-17).¹⁰⁹

Jesus' Teaching Modeled Prophetic Criticism

As we look at the genius of Jesus' teaching methods, one has to wonder where He learned to teach this way. *As a man who grew up under the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, the "Primer" for how Jesus learned to teach was the Old Testament.* Gordon Lewis, in his book *Decide for Yourself; A Theological Workbook*, explores the issue of Scriptural authority and asks "Which view of the Old Testament was held by Christ and the apostolic writers?"¹¹⁰ Jesus' view was that the Old Testament was the authoritative Word of God.¹¹¹ The people in Jesus' day would have most certainly recognized His teaching style as similar to that of the prophets. This is significant in that if we are to apply the principles of Jesus' manner of teaching; it is helpful to look at the Old Testament prophets to further understand the aim and style of Jesus' teaching.

F.F. Bruce also notes the prophetic style of Jesus' teaching in that, He was "far from being an inoffensive person, [He] gave offence right and left. Even his loyal

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 174-175.

¹¹⁰ Gordon Lewis, *Decide for Yourself; A Theological Workbook* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1970), 31.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 31. The following verses show that both Jesus and the Apostolic writers' view was that the Old Testament was the authoritative Word of God. The Old Testament was the source of Jesus' learning as He prepared for ministry; and much of His teaching style modeled the "teachers" of the Old Testament which were primarily the Prophets. If we look at Jesus' teaching style and then compare it to the Prophets, we see similarities in style, i.e. Matthew 12:39-41, Matt. 19:4, 24:37-39, Luke 17:28-32, John 3:14, John 6:31-33, 49, Acts 7:1-53, 1 Cor. 10:7-10, Heb. 11:1-40.

followers found him, at times, thoroughly disconcerting.”¹¹² The prophets were not known for saying things that were easy or comfortable to hear. Bruce notes this about Jesus in his book, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*:

One reason for the complaint that Jesus’ sayings were hard was that he made his hearers think. For some people thinking is a difficult and uncomfortable exercise, especially when it involves the critical reappraisal of firmly held prejudices and convictions, or the challenging of the current consensus of opinion.¹¹³

Bruce observes that Jesus had two kinds of hard sayings: 1. Those that were hard to understand and 2. Those that were too easy to understand!¹¹⁴ In humorous fashion, he notes, “Mark Twain spoke for many when he said that the things in the Bible that bothered him were not those things he did not understand but those that he did understand.”¹¹⁵

T.W. Manson, in *The Sayings of Jesus*, also remarks of Jesus’ prophetic style of teaching:

It will simplify the discussion if we admit the truth at the outset: That the teaching of Jesus is difficult and unacceptable because it runs counter to those elements in human nature which the twentieth century has in common with the first—such things as laziness, greed, the love of pleasure, the instinct to hit back and the like. The teaching as a whole shows that Jesus was well aware of this and recognized that here and nowhere else lay the obstacle that had to be surmounted.¹¹⁶

So if Jesus learned from studying the prophets, what else do we know about how they taught? What can we learn from them? Walter Brueggemann provides valuable insight into these questions. The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception; alternative to the consciousness

¹¹² F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 15.

¹¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, 19. Bruce quotes T.W. Manson in the *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: 1949): 35.

and perception of the dominant culture around us.¹¹⁷ In other words, the task of prophetic ministry is to hold together criticism and energizing-to-action (i.e., activism). True prophetic criticism leads people to action.¹¹⁸ The task of prophetic imagination, Brueggemann claims, is to cut through the numbness, to penetrate self-deception.¹¹⁹ This task has three parts. The first task is to offer *symbols that are adequate to the horror and massiveness of the experience which evokes numbness and requires denial.*¹²⁰ The second task is to bring to public expression those very *fears and terrors that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply*, that we do not know they are there.¹²¹ The third task is to speak metaphorically but concretely about the real deathliness that hovers over us and gnaws within us, and to *speak neither in rage nor in cheap grace*, but with the candor born of anguish and passion.¹²²

The whole ministry and life of Jesus was a type of “emergence of amazement” which modeled prophetic criticism. A few representative actions of Jesus’ radical criticism are as follows: 1. He came ready to forgive sin (Mk. 2:1-11), 2. Jesus came with the ability to heal and the readiness to do it on the Sabbath (Mk. 3:1-6), 3. Jesus was willing to eat with outcasts (Matt 2:15-17), 4. Jesus’ attitude toward the Temple (Mk. 11:15-19) was an ominous threat as He spoke of its destruction.¹²³ Prophetic energizing brings hope (not optimism), permitting the community of God to engage in amazement that will not be snuffed out by despair.¹²⁴ Brueggemann cites Jeremiah,

¹¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 13.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 50.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 83-84.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 96.

Ezekiel, and 2 Isaiah as resources for hopeful imagination today to a Christian community which finds itself alienated in a culture.

Metaphor and Simile in Jeremiah to Bring Newness; Jeremiah 30:12-17

Brueggemann claims that newness comes out of grief. First, Judah's condition is hopeless and incurable (v.12). Next, Jeremiah draws upon a health metaphor to insist that the people are sick even if they think they are well because they have successfully managed to fool themselves into reinterpreting symptoms of sickness as marks of health.¹²⁵

Tom Thatcher provides additional insight into how we (like the prophets) can engage in *cultural exegesis* to discover dominant themes in the culture in a similar way as Jeremiah. He writes: "The easiest way to identify the core of a society's dominant cultural philosophy is to see who resisted that philosophy and the basis of their resistance."¹²⁶ In modeling this prophetic way of teaching we can simply ask the question, "Who is resisting our culture today?" And like the prophets of antiquity, a place to look for clues today is often the poems, lyrics, films and other artistic expressions of our culture. The prophets understood the dominant cultural philosophies and *resisted* them, and by looking at what they were resisting, we can identify the core values of their society. We too can teach this way by 1. Asking who are those who are resisting the culture, speaking out against cultural norms, protesting the status quo? 2. Based upon what they are protesting, what are the dominant cultural philosophies of our society? 3. Then we can join creatively in the protest by

¹²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 36.

¹²⁶ Tom Thatcher, "The Sabbath Trick: Unstable Irony in the Fourth Gospel." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 76 (December 1999): 62.

energizing people to action—criticizing those values which are antithetical to God’s design, and giving creative ideas how to act in a way that restores covenant with God.

Jeremiah shifts in verse 13 to a *metaphor* of fickleness. In verse 14 Jeremiah calls bluff on the *alternative security systems* Judah has set up for herself by way of international political alliances. Jeremiah tells them that those alliances are worthless. After the diagnosis in verse 14, the poet pens God’s theological reason for their condition in verse 15. Essentially, the reason is neither economic nor political...¹²⁷ rather it is because they have broken covenant with Yahweh and are guilty of sin. He uses a powerful *simile*: It is like the idea of abandoning their first love, like a female camel in heat, ready to copulate with anyone available (2:23-24).¹²⁸ Because of this infidelity there will be judgment. Yet in an incredible move of rhetoric in verse 16, Yahweh assures them that eventually they will be restored in their relationship with Him.

Therefore, Jeremiah’s message, much like the message of the Beatitudes was: *Out of grief comes newness*. Brueggemann contends that this passage is paradigmatic as a clue to the theme of grief and newness in the New Testament.¹²⁹ We note this them both in the Beatitudes (Luke 6:21,25), where Jesus speaks of those who mourn now will some day laugh, and in the Farewell Discourse of John 16:20-22, where the sorrowful farewell is an anticipation of rejoicing like when a child is born after labor.¹³⁰ Jesus life was in many ways a parabolic enactment of prophetic criticism affirming a theological perspective that *grief and brokenness leads to newness*.

¹²⁷ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 37.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 45.

Memory Allows Possibility: 2 Isaiah

Brueggemann's study of 2 Isaiah claims that through his prophetic literature Isaiah gives us a way to understand the history of Israel. In doing this the audience/reader finds new possibilities which allow him to be poised for receiving the newness God brings as he responds appropriately to the prophetic message. This principle of remembering will be further explored in chapter four regarding the transforming principle of *remembrance* in the wilderness. Brueggemann helps us see that the prophetic way of teaching (which Jesus often modeled) leaned heavily on recollection of God's activity in history as the path toward possibility; i.e. transformed life results in active and sacrificial worship.

In his book *Hopeful Imagination*, Brueggemann outlines three metaphors for re-reading Israel's life. One metaphor pertinent to our thesis is that of *exile*. This was a theme with which Jesus was well acquainted and a theme which usually comes to the fore as part of any wilderness experience. Isaiah aims at the Babylonian exile to call the nation to an understanding of their *alienation from God*. We find in times of solitude or wilderness experience a deep realization of one's sin, alienation, and tendency to stray from God. All of mankind has this propensity. Solitude or exile in the wilderness is like a *furnace of transformation*¹³¹ which allows space for the possibility of honesty and transformation before God. Isaiah imagines a severely refining process of repentance which allows the possibility of hope and holy activity causing Israel to live in such a way to get glory for God.¹³²

Brueggemann concludes his study of 2 Isaiah with an analysis of Isaiah 54:1-17. He shows how the poet uses *memory* to bring Israel to historical *possibility*. In

¹³¹ Henry Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), 20.

Isaiah 54:1-4 the poet makes use of the Sarah-memory. The memory he evokes is that the history of Israel is paralleled to the story of a series of barren women (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah) who are later surprised by births.¹³³ The outcome the author of 2 Isaiah hopes for is *a new, fearless Israel no longer needing to accept a lesser position assigned by the empire.*¹³⁴

This is clearly a theme of the type of transformation that takes place in wilderness experiences throughout the Scriptures, and it gives us a theological reason to believe that this can be an outcome of wilderness experiences with young people today, i.e. that participants on a journey will return home with an edge of fearlessness—able to say “no” to the principles of the world and free to say “yes” to a Kingdom-life of brokenness and humility. Concluding his *exegesis* of this passage, Brueggemann notes that verses 6-8 acknowledge the reality of the exile and the fact that it is *caused by God*. Verse 10 represents a move from memory toward new possibility. It asserts that God’s covenant loyalty is just as reliable as creation.

Thus, from these examples, we see that Jesus’ teaching style carries over a strong use of metaphor, simile, and energizing critique towards action—which characterized the teaching of the Hebrew prophets. This style of teaching is a skill much needed among outdoor leaders—as the wilderness is an ideal environment to teach experientially these themes of exile, hope, and transformation. Reaching the young of our world today requires leaders who are being truly transformed through abiding in Jesus Christ. We need leaders who have a unique hope which stimulates vision for what *could happen* in a young person’s life regardless of their

¹³² George Muller, "George Muller And The Secret Of His Power In Prayer," <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/muller/prayer.html>.

¹³³ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 115.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 117.

circumstances. Jesus ancient prophetic style of teaching is a timeless form of training; and the wilderness is still a prime setting for a prophetic style of teaching today.

Setting

At the outset of our thesis we stated that the Scriptures indicate God is concerned as much with the *timing (who and when)* and *setting (where)* of His teaching as He is with the content (what), methodology (how), and why (purpose) of His teaching. We observe that it was mostly within the setting of real life situations that Jesus taught. Appendix I provides a table of each account which we have identified throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament which relates to the role of *setting* and *timing* in God's activity to change the lives of His followers through history. The following section will highlight various categories of *settings* in which Jesus taught. In our theological framework (chapter five) we will explore passages that indicate Jesus' practice of experiential learning techniques. The *setting* of Jesus teaching can be divided into the following categories; *who* He taught, *where* He taught, and *when* He taught.

This section will be especially relevant to the development of our project design, as we seek to train leaders in the art of outdoor leadership with attentiveness to appropriate timing and setting to communicate the Gospel effectively. The apostle Peter affirms this principle of timing in leadership as well: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15b). These principles will also be considered in chapter four regarding Jesus' rhythm of engagement and retreat.

The Master/Disciple Relationship: Who He Taught

According to the Scriptures, *who* did Jesus Christ teach? We see that He regularly taught individuals, and groups of all sizes, yet He invested most of His time with Peter, James, John, and His group of twelve disciples. He invested time with a group of Seventy-Two, and an even larger group of One Hundred Twenty who He sent out to preach. He also spent a considerable amount of time with the masses. Jesus shared meals with “sinners,” which seemed to be an activity He greatly enjoyed; for example sharing a meal with Matthew and his friends, as well as reclining with Zacchaeus at his home. And Jesus spent time in dialogue with the Pharisees and religious teachers. He prioritized engaging the people of Israel but also pursued a few selected Gentiles, like the women at the well in Samaria. Overall, He taught a variety of people in virtually every imaginable setting. In regard to our attention in this thesis to the elements of timing and setting, it is important to observe that Jesus carefully took into consideration *who* He was teaching before He decided *what, how, and why* to teach them.

We can presume from what we know of the Twelve that many of Jesus’ disciples probably would not have initially chosen to be together. For example Simon the Zealot was an extreme nationalist and proponent for the independence of Israel from the Roman government—even as this meant taking up arms. Levi the tax collector would most likely have taken a position of accommodation to the Roman Empire in order to survive and thrive—capitalizing on the benefits of Hellenization. Thus, their opposing political views would probably have affected their respect for one another. Short term wilderness journeys produce similar fruit in that they can be a fertile environment for bringing a variety of young people together into community relationships. For example, Simon Beames, in his article *Critical Elements of an*

Expedition Experience, interviewed several participants during an adventure experience in Ghana who affirmed this reality,

Rufus felt that ‘living in a tight community where there’s no escape’ was an important aspect of the experience. He explained... that unlike the UK, where ‘if you don’t like someone you can just walk away or not phone them again or stay out of their way’, the circumstances of the physical setting demanded that people get along with each other. Rufus expanded on this point by saying ‘you have to get along with people, you have to compromise, you have to resolve conflicts’ Gordo’s observation about how the physical setting affects social interactions... ‘It’s not just about speaking to people you get on with best. It’s about learning to speak with people that you want to avoid!’ In her matter-of-fact manner, Tracy summed up this point by stating that ‘the fact that we’re miles from anywhere and thrown together in this situation is important.’¹³⁵

These young people make a poignant observation about the nature of learning in community. Similar to Rufus and Gordo’s experience, the Disciples usually understood the significance of what Jesus taught *in retrospect*. Jesus did not expect His disciples to *immediately* grasp the significance of what He taught them. He was confident that transformation was happening regardless of any outward signs of growth. Peter Scaer agrees: “Often in pedagogy, the student learns to perform tasks, and only later to understand their significance.”¹³⁶

In discipleship we learn to imitate Jesus Christ (often through certain tasks) and then only later, after submitting our will to Christ in obedience, do we understand the significance of our actions. Today young people, especially in Western societies where entitlement has become an idol, will often say, “Show me the significance or purpose first, then I’ll think about doing the task if it seems to be worth my effort—if it appears to have some benefit for me.” And if we are honest, we must admit to a great extent teaching in the church today is focused on persuading disciples towards

¹³⁵ Simon Beames, "Critical Elements of an Expedition Experience." *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 4, no. 2 (2004): 150-151.

¹³⁶ Peter J. Scaer, "Jesus and the Women at the Well: Where Mission Meets Worship," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 1, no. 67 (January 2003): 18.

discipleship by attempting to illuminate the *significance or purpose* of obedience.

This only feeds an entitlement view of discipleship, i.e. “Show me that it’s worth my time and then I’ll commit to it.”

Yet Jesus claims the entire life of His disciples. *As we obey* Him, we begin to *grasp the significance* of what we are doing. We walk by faith, not by sight. This is a principle that must not be confused, regardless of how entertainment-oriented, enlightened, or post modern our culture has become. Churches today are struggling with syncretistic tendencies to make following Jesus “relevant”, “significant” or “worthwhile”—this is an inadequate and inappropriate response to Jesus Christ and will only grow shallow-rooted followers who will lack perseverance when pressed. Jesus invited a variety of friends into community—embarking with them on a quest to *get glory for God*. He molded a diverse group of men—modeling God’s design for holy relationships (John 10:10).

The Teacher

Before scrutinizing further *who* Jesus taught, it is helpful to describe some of what we know about the Teacher Himself. Archibald Hunter, in *The Work and Words of Jesus*, provides an extensive study of Jesus. He observes, “The evangelists were not particularly interested in presenting the background of His life in chronological order, yet we do know the date of His birth, the length of His ministry, and the date of His crucifixion.”¹³⁷ Geographically, He grew up and worked in Palestine and spent most of His time in Galilee, Samaria, around *Decapolis* and *Perea*. He also spent a considerable amount of time in the wilderness and the hill country of Judea.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Archibald Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), 18.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 21-23.

A broad description of Jesus' ministry would include His early Galilean and Judean ministries.¹³⁹ In Acts 10:37-41, Peter reveals three distinct stages of Jesus' ministry.¹⁴⁰ First He began preaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, then continued teaching and healing by the lakeside, followed by a period of retirement to the hill country with His band of disciples who was eventually sent out on a preaching and healing mission. His Galilean ministry was characterized by a period of travel¹⁴¹ including trips to Caesarea Philippi¹⁴² and later to the Mount of Transfiguration.¹⁴³ After the transfiguration, He and the disciples traveled south from the region of Caesarea Philippi.¹⁴⁴ The chief stages of this final journey included going south through Galilee with a brief stop in Capernaum. Then He went into the regions of Judea and beyond the Jordan. From Jericho He traveled to Jerusalem, and then withdrew across the Jordan before the unfolding of the Passion and Resurrection.¹⁴⁵

His Method Was *Relationships*

To begin His mission, *Jesus started with a small group*. Like a wise architect who knew how to build a lasting foundation, or seasoned warrior who knows the art of war, Jesus sought to gain a *strong base of operation* first in the Holy Land.¹⁴⁶ Jesus spent most of His three year ministry with The Twelve. Clearly, at the heart of Jesus' strategy to carry the message of good news to the ends of the earth was to build a mission community. In other words *men were his method*: "His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would

¹³⁹ Ibid., 53. Mark 1:14-6:56 (The Gospel of Mark seems to organize materials in order, but some have questioned if his stories are organized in a topical format).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid..

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Also see Mark 7:24-8:26.

¹⁴² Ibid., 64. Also see Mark 8:27-38.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 66. Also see Mark 9:2-8.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 131. Also see Mark 9:30, 33.

follow.”¹⁴⁷ His disciples were a group of ordinary men whom He called into an extraordinary relationship. The disciple’s varied personalities offer many insights into how Jesus transformed His friends. Perhaps the choosing of the Twelve was also a parable in itself to show how His church would be built across all racial, geographic, gender, and economic lines. His mission community would be *unified, but certainly not uniform!*

William Barclay, in *The Master’s Men* provides insight into the personalities of the Twelve. Jesus was the Master of bringing individuals and groups to maturity. Peter, the man who became a “Rock” was a Galilean fisherman who was part of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples along with James and John.¹⁴⁸ Galileans were traditionally a courageous stock of men.¹⁴⁹ We see from the outset that Jesus chose men who were prepared to follow Him... those whom the Holy Spirit had quickened to forsake all for Him¹⁵⁰: “Jesus did not have the time or the desire to scatter himself on those who wanted to make their own terms of discipleship.”¹⁵¹

Peter had several unique experiences with Jesus, witnessing the Raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), and Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:40; Mark 14:37). Peter was also sent with John ahead to prepare the last Passover in Jerusalem.¹⁵² He is known for his declaration that Jesus was the Messiah, and his great discovery that no one else had the words of life.¹⁵³ He was the recipient of

¹⁴⁶ A.B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871), 100.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 27.

¹⁴⁸ A.B. Bruce, 36.

¹⁴⁹ William Barclay, *The Master’s Men* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1959), 18. “The Galileans have never been destitute of courage” (Josephus, *Life*, 17; *Wars of the Jews* 3, 32). ”

¹⁵⁰ A.B. Bruce, 17. See also Luke 9:62.

¹⁵¹ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*: 53.

¹⁵² Barclay: 19. See also Luke 22:8.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 19. See also John 6:66-69.

Jesus' *great promise* (that Jesus would build His church upon him), as well as His *great rebuke*, "Get thee behind me, Satan."¹⁵⁴ Ironically Peter is known both for his *denial of Jesus*, and *Christ's loyalty toward Him* as He imparted to him the Great Commission at the empty tomb. Peter is remembered for grasping that the *Missio Dei* included Gentiles as he received Cornelius into fellowship of the Church.¹⁵⁵

We also have much historical data about the Apostle John. In Barclay's words, "He was the Son of Thunder who became the Apostle of Love."¹⁵⁶ The synoptic gospels primarily describe John in an unattractive way—highlighting the "thunderous" aspect of his personality, whereas the Gospel of John highlights a transformed John—the Apostle of Love:

At first sight John appears as a man of ever-reaching ambition, a man with an explosive temper, a man of an intolerant heart.... John is the supreme example of how Jesus Christ can take a man as he is and use his natural gifts and powers and temperament for greatness. Power itself is always neutral. Power becomes good or bad according to the mind and heart of the person by whom it is controlled and used. In John there was always power and the power was united with loveliness when it was controlled by Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁷

Andrew, the second disciple chosen by Jesus was uniquely devoted to introducing others to the Him. Every strong leader needs a follower like Andrew:

Andrew was the kind of man who never received the first place; yet he was also the kind of man on whom every leader depends, and who is the backbone of the Christian church and the salt of the earth.¹⁵⁸

Andrew displayed several wonderful qualities in his relationship with Jesus. First, he was *selfless*. Andrew knew his brother Peter was a natural leader so he quickly

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 21. The Great Promise: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18), The Great Rebuke: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt: 16:22-23; Mark 8:32-33).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 23-24. Regarding the Great Commission: "It was Peter who was the first to enter the tomb and find it empty (John 20:6)," regarding the Great Realization: (Acts 10).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 31, 39.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 41-44.

introduced him to Jesus; “For Andrew missionary work began at home.”¹⁵⁹ Second, he was *optimistic* and *enthusiastic*, eagerly bringing people to Christ; for example the boy with loaves and fishes.¹⁶⁰ Third, he was a man ahead of his time in that he saw the universality of Jesus’ invitation; that the grace of God which brings salvation to all men had appeared in the person of Jesus Christ: “He understood Jesus so well that he knew that there was no one whom Jesus did not wish to see, and that there was no time when Jesus was too busy to give himself to the seeking and the inquiring searcher for the truth.”¹⁶¹

Thomas was the disciple who became certain by doubting.¹⁶² He is known by several unique qualities. 1) He was a man of courage, supporting Jesus’ desire to see Lazarus: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). 2) He was often bewildered (John 14:1-6), 3) initially he could not wholeheartedly believe in Jesus Christ (John 20:25), and 4) he became a man of devotion and faith (John 20:26-28). Two principles emerge from observing Thomas’ relationship with Jesus: (a) Jesus blames no man for wanting to be sure,¹⁶³ and (b) certainty is most likely to come to a man in the fellowship of believers —thus making the need for being a part of the believing community clear.¹⁶⁴ Thomas provides a wonderful example to many young people who participate in wilderness journeys: Although they may be searching, having many doubts, the environment of community itself is often a climate which promotes new faith.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 42. See also John 1:40-42.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 49.

¹⁶³ Another example of this principle is found in Jesus’ response to John the Baptist when from prison he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else” (Matthew 11:3)?

¹⁶⁴ Barclay, 50.

Matthew was the disciple who previous to his submission to Jesus, was probably despised by most of his community because of his profession as a tax collector.¹⁶⁵ Yet we learn from Matthew's example that Jesus called sinners to follow Him, and His concern was with all peoples. A.B. Bruce highlights the importance of Mathew's call:

The call of Mathew signally illustrates a very prominent feature in the public action of Jesus, viz., His utter disregard of the maxims of worldly wisdom. A publican disciple, much more a publican apostle, could not fail to be a stumbling block to Jewish prejudice, and therefore to be, for the time at least, a source of weakness rather than of strength.... Aware that both He and His disciples would be despised and rejected of men for a season, He went calmly on His way, choosing for His companions and agents 'whom He would,' undisturbed by the gainsaying of His generation—like one who knew that His work concerned all nations and all time.¹⁶⁶

We do not know as much about the rest of the disciples. Judas Iscariot was the man who became the one who betrayed Jesus.¹⁶⁷ James, the brother of Jesus was first an enemy who later became the friend.¹⁶⁸ Philip was the first man called to follow Jesus, later becoming an evangelist to Samaria and beyond.¹⁶⁹ Simon the Zealot was the man who began following Jesus overcome with anger, but ended full of love.¹⁷⁰ James, the brother of John was the first of the Twelve to become a martyr.¹⁷¹ From Scripture and church history we know very little about Bartholomew, Nathanael, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus.

Jesus' disciples, when invited to follow, did not enter a community as in the typical rabbi-student relationship, but rather followed Jesus in a personal way:

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹⁶⁶ A.B. Bruce, 19-20.

¹⁶⁷ Barclay, 69.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 93.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 100.

It must be noticed that the disciples did not enter a community but followed Jesus as a person.... The Old Testament background is important for the ‘following’ of Jesus, especially the story of how Elisha is called away from his plough by Elijah. Elisha’s answer is expressed in the words, ‘I will follow you’ (1 Kings 19:20). The same passage shows how stern and uncompromising the call of Jesus was. Elisha, sent back to his ploughing, was allowed to take leave of his father and mother (1 Kings 19:20). Jesus forbade it, for ‘No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:62).¹⁷²

Mission community was the goal of Jesus’ fellowship, so He invested heavily in the lives of those He trained. A training principle can be drawn from these observations:

The more concentrated the size of the group being taught, the greater opportunity for learning. In a profound sense, He is showing us how the Great Commission can become the controlling purpose of every family circle, every small group gathering, every close friendship in this life.¹⁷³

The Twelve were also Jesus’ *traveling companions*. They were with Him almost all the time, “witnessing all His work, and ministering to His daily needs.”¹⁷⁴ The disciples were under-shepherds who would carry on His work. Jesus was limited in His humanness, therefore He could not spend time with everyone; instead He chose to develop spiritual leaders whom others would follow.¹⁷⁵

In preparing the disciples, Jesus heightened the disciples’ awareness of Satan’s strategy to defeat them. A.B. Bruce provides insight into Satan’s creed:

...the whole aim of Satanic policy is to get self-interest recognized as the chief end of man. Satan’s temptations aim at nothing worse than this. Satan is called the Prince of this world, because self-interest rules the world; he is called the accuser of the brethren, because he does not believe that even the sons of God have any higher motive.... There is absolutely no such thing as a surrender of the lower life for the higher; all men are selfish at heart, and have their price: some may hold out longer than others, but in the last extremity every man will prefer his own things to the things of God. All that a man hath will he give for his life, his moral integrity and his piety not excepted.’ Such is Satan’s creed.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Otto Betz, *What We Know About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968): 75-76.

¹⁷³ Robert Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle; Conforming Your Life to Kingdom Priorities* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 59.

¹⁷⁴ A.B. Bruce, 29.

¹⁷⁵ Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle; Conforming Your Life to Kingdom Priorities*, 58. See also Matt. 9:37, 38.

¹⁷⁶ A.B. Bruce, 180.

Since Jesus was taking His disciples on a journey (spiritually, physically, emotionally, and intellectually) and the dangers were immanent so He instructed them to *pack light*. Like any good soldier or shepherd they had to learn to live on little and keep their lives simple so that they could focus their efforts on the *mission* rather than on the cares of the world. In other words, Jesus' message to His disciples was:

Go at once, and go as you are, and trouble not yourselves about food or raiment, or any bodily want; trust in God for these. His instructions proceeded on the principle of division of labor assigning to the servants the kingdom military duty, and to God the commissariat department....God would provide for them through the instrumentality of his people.¹⁷⁷

Any group on a journey will experience the dynamics of group formation. Living in community can bring out the best and worst in one another. As groups form, natural leaders arise, and various roles, needed for the group to function, are filled by those who have the appropriate gifts. Jesus' band of disciples provides a living parable of group dynamics in that Jesus brought unity among a group that had vast differences in personality, thus providing vision for the Kingdom of God:

This union of opposites was not accidental, but was designed by Jesus as prophecy of the future.... So in the church of the future there should be neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, bond or free, but only Christ....¹⁷⁸

The Discipleship Model of the Early Church

Robert Coleman, in his book *Master Plan of Evangelism*, traced the underlying strategy of Jesus' personal ministry highlighting a model of working with the Three, the Twelve, the Seventy, and the masses. In *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, he shows how (after the ascension of Jesus Christ) the *apostolic church* carried out its mandate for mission. This model of discipleship is largely observed in

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 112-113.

the book of Acts. Coleman writes, “The Book of Acts makes it clear that bringing the Gospel to every creature is God’s program, and it can be accomplished.”¹⁷⁹ Early in church history there is a precedent for small group ministry. It was noted in the introduction of this thesis, learning leads to transformation in small groups. This happens not only because people are able to know one another and feel safe in the small community, but it is also easier for the shepherd or pastor of the group to facilitate learning through real life experiences. Coleman notes:

One has to ask, in all honesty, why did not the Christians erect special buildings for their corporate meetings, especially after leaving the synagogues? ...It seems probable that, ‘The Christians simply saw no compelling reason to erect buildings for worship.’ They gathered at home, where they lived their faith every day. In this relaxed atmosphere they learned together even as they shared one another’s burdens.¹⁸⁰

Along The Journey: Where Jesus Taught

Like any good shepherd, Jesus was also concerned with the environment in which He tended His flock. The environment of His teaching can be understood in two main categories. Our main concerns are *where (setting)* and *when (timing)* Jesus taught. We know that Jesus taught in a variety of urban and wilderness settings. He taught indoors, outdoors, in homes, along the road, on the sea, in the desert, on top of mountains, and next to rivers. Jesus trained on the move. He did not stay in one place very long. He went from village to village, through fields and valleys; journeying with His disciples through various landscapes to provide experiences and a laboratory from which to teach them about the Father, the Kingdom, Himself, and their commission to be a light to the nations.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 35-36.

¹⁷⁹ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1998), 31.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 56-57.

C.H. Dodd in *The Parables of the Kingdom* encourages a strong contextual reading of the parables. He focuses on the historical settings of the parables which are an especially important source of data on the career of Jesus Christ. We find in the parables that the most common setting of Jesus' teaching was in the *natural environment*. His observations from nature become the prime source from which He makes illustrations to the Kingdom of God. The parables in the Gospels are remarkably true to every day life:

Each similitude or story is a perfect picture of something that can be observed in the world of our existence. The processes of nature are accurately observed and recorded; the actions of persons in the stories are in character; they are either such as anyone would recognize as natural in the circumstances, or, if they are surprising, the point of the parable is that such actions *are* surprising.¹⁸¹

Dodd asserts, the Kingdom of God is “intrinsically like the processes of nature and of the daily life of men....”¹⁸² In creation, we see at work the very principles of the Kingdom:

Since nature and super-nature are one order, you can take any part of that order and find in it illumination for other parts. Thus the falling of rain is a religious thing, for it is God who makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust; the death of a sparrow can be contemplated without despairing of the goodness of nature, because the bird is not forgotten by your Father'; and the love of God is present in the natural affection of a father for his scapegrace son. This sense of divineness of the natural order is the major premises of all the parables....¹⁸³

When Jesus taught people about the Kingdom, His aim was to change lives, not to provide moral generalities for the religiously inclined. When people listened to Him teach, they were surrounded by environmental stimuli which aroused their senses

¹⁸¹ Dodd, 9. This pertains particularly to the employer who pays the same wages for an hours work.

¹⁸² Ibid., 10.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 10-11.

and heightened learning. Understanding *where* Jesus taught will enable the outdoor leader to *use the natural environment* in the same way He did.¹⁸⁴

For example, Jesus illustrates the power of faith by analogies from nature.

F.F. Bruce writes,

If faith is present at all, even if it is no bigger than a mustard seed, it can accomplish wonders: think what a large plant springs from something as tiny as a mustard seed. It may be that, 'Jesus is using such a form of words figuratively to describe the incalculable effects of prevailing faith.'¹⁸⁵

Joachim Jeremias, in *The Parables of Jesus*, provides a detailed description of the context of Jesus' teaching from a Palestinian perspective. His study provides deeper textual criticism on the subject. Jeremias is concerned with the redaction process, the audience, and the influence of Old Testament and Folk-Story themes. He also provides a description of the church's situation at the time the evangelists wrote their account of the gospel. His aim is to return to the most ancient forms of the parables available to recover what Jesus Himself meant in the original context. He writes:

... the parables of Jesus are not—at any rate primarily—literary productions, nor is it their object to lay down general maxims ('no one would crucify a teacher who told pleasant stories to enforce prudential morality'), but each of them was *uttered in an actual situation* of the life of Jesus, at a particular and often unforeseen point. Moreover, as we shall see, they were preponderantly concerned with a situation of conflict. They correct, reprove, attack. For the greater part, though not exclusively, the parables are weapons of warfare. Every one of them calls for immediate response.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 13-14. C.H. Dodd asks: "...was all this wealth of loving observation and imaginative rendering of nature and common life used merely to adorn moral generalities? Was the Jesus of the Gospels just an eminently sound and practical teacher, who patiently led simple minds to appreciate the great enduring commonplaces of morals and religion? ...We should expect the parables to bear upon the actual and the critical situation in which Jesus and his hearers stood; and when we ask after their application; we must look first, not to the field of general principles, but to the particular setting in which they were delivered. The task of the interpreter of the parables is to find out, if he can, the setting of a parable in the situation contemplated by the Gospels, and hence the application which would suggest itself to one who stood in that situation."

¹⁸⁵ F.F. Bruce, 211. "We are not afraid when the earth heaves and the mountains are hurled into the sea": so Psalm 46:2 (NEB) describes a real or figurative convulsion of nature which leaves men and women of God unshaken because he is their refuge and strength."

¹⁸⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 21. Italics added.

Jesus continually drew teaching material from the ordinary world around Him—from the “open book of Nature.”¹⁸⁷ For example, Archibald Hunter, in *Interpreting the Parables* illustrates how Jesus used metaphors from weather to paint a vision of the Kingdom:

...the cloud in the west foretelling rain, the south wind with its promise of heat; or the budding fig tree which is the harbinger of summer; or all the images of men going forth to till and reap the fields: the ploughman, with his eyes fixed straight ahead; the seed growing secretly, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear; and then the fields white with a plentiful harvest, with the labourers putting in the sickle because the time for reaping has come.¹⁸⁸

Another vivid example of how Jesus teaches on the move transpires along the road to Emmaus. The two disciples who encountered Jesus along their journey were in need of understanding and encouragement. Sharon Cheston, in her article *Spirituality of Encouragement*, writes:

Jesus met two discouraged disciples immediately following the crucifixion. Not knowing that it was Jesus who was walking with them, the disciples indicated their confusion and discouragement over what they had just witnessed. Jesus listened, gently pointed out how the prophecy had been fulfilled, went to their house, and broke bread with them. Then he revealed himself to them. They were so encouraged that they immediately ran the several miles back to Jerusalem.¹⁸⁹

It is important to note that Jesus did not prevent these men from experiencing pain and discouragement. Rather He met them in the midst of their struggle. We commonly see this principle at work in wilderness adventures as well. Simon Beames illustrates the fruit of several young people’s changed lives as they endured physical challenges on their journey:

Mildred explained how she was ‘absolutely loving being completely knackered at the end of the day’. Sylvio has the similar opinion: ‘you do feel better at the end of the day, when you walked back to your camp and you were

¹⁸⁷ Hunter, 14.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸⁹ Sharon E. Cheston, "Spirituality of Encouragement." *Journal of Individual Psychology* 56, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 302.

tired—it does something.' These quotes demonstrate how the expedition would not have held the same meanings for the venturers if it had not been physically challenging.¹⁹⁰

This is the type of encouragement we want young people to feel when they return to the city after a transforming wilderness experience.

Although Jesus often taught along the journey, it is important to note that this method of teaching, although similar to the prophets, was distinctly unique in that He rarely *led* people into the desert to teach them, rather *people followed Him as He sought places of solitude for His disciples:*

If evoking images of the wilderness was Jesus' purpose, however, he did so by taking advantage of the situation, not by symbolically re-enacting the event. Unlike the first century desert prophets who led people into the wilderness, Jesus did not lead the people to the deserted place, but was actually followed their by them as he sought a place of solitude for his disciples (Mark 6:31-34). Once there, however, he was willing to take advantage of the situation and employ imagery appropriate to it.¹⁹¹

In developing outdoor leaders, this distinction is important in respect to the art and spirituality of guiding. From Jesus' example of setting out to find places of solitude for His disciples we observe two varying perspectives one could have regarding his or her role as an outdoor leader. A leader could easily fall into a faulty perspective believing, "I am *taking* these young people to the wilderness so that they can encounter Jesus Christ." Instead, the principle we learn from Jesus' life can lead us to a proper perspective and more fruitful ministry, i.e. "I am *going into the wilderness to meet with God*, and I am inviting others along. As the Holy Spirit leads, I prayerfully anticipate opportunities to take advantage of the wilderness setting to introduce young people to my master, Jesus Christ."

¹⁹⁰ Beames, 153.

¹⁹¹ Joshua Paul Smith, "Finding Jesus in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Wanderings Motif and Jesus' Self-Identity" (Th.M. Research Seminar Paper., Talbot School of Theology; Biola University, La Mirada, CA), 2005: 39.

When Jesus Taught

Jesus crafted His teaching to take advantage of the environment in which He taught. In the same careful manner which He drew illustrations from the physical setting, He was also acutely sensitive to the issue of *timing*, i.e. *when* He taught.

Timing is important in any relationship. Whether we are bringing good news or bad news to someone, it is wise to consider an appropriate occasion to deliver the message. Jesus was the Master of good timing. Not only was He aware of the environment in which He was teaching, but He was also concerned with the emotional, physical, and intellectual state of His audience. Jesus paid careful attention to timing because His aim was to change people's lives—not just to convince people to believe in certain truths.

Jesus was not trying to impress people or to become a well-known person who others would follow because of His eloquent or relevant rhetoric. Rather, His goal was to invite people into a transforming relationship with Him *at a point in time* where they might be ready to believe, turn, and follow Him. Like a farmer carefully waiting for the right time to plant and harvest, Jesus took care in waiting for the moment to sow the life-bearing seeds of the Word of God. This timing was revealed to Him as it is to us today through prayerful listening to the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was aware of the timing of the Holy Spirit in the course of everyday life and He often used strategically crafted wilderness experiences to initiate the Holy Spirit's plan to turn men's hearts toward God. We observe in Jesus' ministry that *He often worked to prepare the soil of men's hearts through the natural rhythms of stress; weather, thirst, hunger, grief, fear, fatigue, frustration, confusion.*

There were times when Jesus strategically taught in non-stress environments. Yet especially with His disciples, He sought to take them from a place of comfort and orientation, to a state of disorientation where they were stretched and out of their

comfort zones. Then He brought to rest, like a good shepherd, in a state of *new orientation*, where the boundaries of their faith had been expanded.

Walter Brueggemann has observed this rhythm of spiritual transformation throughout the Psalms in his book, *The Message of the Psalms*. He describes this rhythm in terms of *orientation*, *disorientation*, and *new orientation*. The Psalms of *orientation* describe a “happy, blessed state in which the speakers are grateful for and confident in the abiding, reliable gifts of life that are long-standing from time past and will endure for time to come.”¹⁹² In contrast, the Psalms of *disorientation* cry out the reality that life is really not always a blissful state of orientation. Brueggemann writes, “Life is not like that. Life is also savagely marked by disequilibrium, incoherence, and unrelieved asymmetry.”¹⁹³ Finally, the Psalms of *new orientation*:

...bear witness to the surprising gift of new life just when none had been expected. That new orientation is not a return to the old stable orientation, for there is no such going back. The psalmists know that we can never go home again. Once there has been an exchange of real candor, as there is here between Yahweh and Israel, there is no return to the pre-candor situation.¹⁹⁴

Stress Teaching Moments

The Environmental, Physical, Emotional, and Intellectual State of the Audience

Working within the rhythm of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation in the physical realm of His audience, Jesus was able to craft the appropriate time to preach His life-changing Word. Archbishop Trench brings our attention to the

¹⁹²Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984): 25. We note these Psalms of Orientation according to Brueggemann: Psalms 145, 104, 33, 8, 1, 119, 37, 14, 112, 133, 131.

¹⁹³Ibid., 51. We note these Psalms of Disorientation: 13, 86, 35, 74, 79, 137, 88, 109, 50, 81, 32, 51, 143, 130, 49, 90, and 73.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 124. We note these Psalms of New Orientation: 30, 40, 138, 34, 65, 66, 124, 114, 29, 96, 97, 99, 47, 27, 23, 91, 117, 135, 103, 113, 146, 148, 100, 149, and 150.

prophetic and parabolic nature of the physical realm we experience in our day to day lives:

We must not forget, indeed, that nature in its present state contains but a prophecy of its coming glory; it ‘groaneth and travaileth’; it is suffering under our curse. Yet suffering thus, it has more fitting symbols to declare to us our disease and misery, and the processes of their healing. It has its storms, and wildernesses, its lions and adders, by these interpreting to us death and all that leads to death, no less than by its more beneficent workings of life and all that tends to the restoring and maintaining of life.¹⁹⁵

Storms were common *settings* for Jesus to deepen the faith of His disciples.

During one storm, while the Disciples rowed against the wind, they became *tired, wet, cold, and afraid*. To make the situation even more stressful, the event of the storm took place at *night* (Mark 6:48). A.B. Bruce describes the significance of this *setting*:

The storm took place by night; in the absence of Jesus; and while it lasted all progress was arrested. Storms at sea may happen at all hours of the day, but trials of faith always happen in the night. Were there no darkness there would be no trial.... Christ is not in the ship while the storm rages by night, and we toil on in rowing, unaided, as we think, by His grace, uncheered by His spiritual presence.... The storm on the lake, besides being an apt emblem of the trial of faith, was for the twelve an important lesson in faith, helping to prepare them for the future which awaited them. The temporary absence of their Master was a preparation for His perpetual absence.¹⁹⁶

This was such a difficult trial for the Twelve that they had utterly forgotten the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 from the previous day. Jesus had known their *moral state of being* after the miracle of the bread and fish: “Their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:51).” Aware of their spiritual state of being (their hearts were hardened) Jesus immediately initiated a wilderness experience on the lake to show them through the terror of the night, that He is God. The evangelist notes, “Immediately [after the miracle of the 5,000] Jesus *made* His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd.”¹⁹⁷ He

¹⁹⁵ Trench, 9.

¹⁹⁶ A.B. Bruce, 132.

¹⁹⁷ Mark 6:45; italics added for emphasis, brackets added for context.

knew that the miracle of the bread and fish had not changed their hearts, so in the perfect timing of the Holy Spirit, He initiated an appropriate adventure to open their eyes and soften their hearts.

When the Disciples saw Jesus walking on the water during the fourth watch of the night, “They thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified (Mark 6:49).” Mark continues the narrative:

Immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! I AM¹⁹⁸, Don’t be afraid. Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:50b-52)

Timing was obviously important to Jesus in this account. Mark records that Jesus, “saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them (Mark 6:48).” But He *waited* to come to them walking on the water. He was waiting until the right moment when they were sufficiently worn out and afraid that they might perish. Then He came to them *walking on the very waves that were threatening to kill them*. Even though anyone would be afraid in the face of such a storm, the disciples must have felt the gravity of Jesus’ figurative parable as they saw Him making a footstool of the waves, which was the source of their fears. Most scholars agree that it was the Apostle Peter narrating this account to Mark, and the commentary added in verse 52, “because their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52),” was most likely dictated by Peter.¹⁹⁹ This detail indicates that in retrospect, Peter acknowledged that *this perfectly timed experience* was a tool Jesus used to change their hearts and establish loyalty and belief in Christ.

¹⁹⁸ *ego eimi*.

¹⁹⁹ Graham Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 57.

Jesus Was Aware of the Moral State of Being of His Audience

Most scholars agree that it was the *moral* situation of the audience which was the chief concern of Jesus:

...for we cannot believe that Christ was led to speak as He did by merely picturesque influences, any more than we can believe that He then and there opened His mouth in parables from a merely intellectual liking for that symbolic manner of expressing thought. The motive must have come from the spiritual composition and condition of the crowd.²⁰⁰

Knowing the audience's moral state of being is the basis for being able to effectively engage the hearts of men. This awareness, thus, creates the possibility for a transforming response to the message. Jesus was aware of what issues were hindering people from following God and with appropriate timing He would carefully craft an illustration from His surroundings to pierce their hearts.

Often it is tempting as a teacher to *make an analogy fit a situation*. Yet, if the timing or the illustration does not connect with the *moral state of the group*, then it will unlikely evoke a response. Similarly, the benefit of wilderness trips with young people relies on training leaders to first carefully identify the issues young people are dealing with and then to learn to communicate Biblical truth, using the *surroundings* and *proper timing*.

Several examples below show how Jesus was prompted to teach by His awareness of the moral state of His audience. The selected examples reveal His concern with *timing*. He taught:

1. In answer to questions.
2. In answer to requests.
3. In response to complaints.
4. To illustrate his own stated purpose.
5. To apply truth to situations that arose.
 - a. Observing the building of a house: Matt. 7:24-26.
 - b. When children rudely interrupt Him: Luke 7:31-35.

²⁰⁰ A.B. Bruce, 17.

- c. Since the nations reject Him as King, He speaks of the parables of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13.
- d. To correct a statement by the Pharisee: “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” He teaches the parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-24).
- e. Harvest (John 4:35-39).
- f. Little boy, humility (Matt. 18:2-5).
- g. Woman caught in adultery; He wrote on ground (John 8:1-8).
- h. Fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-24).
- i. Coin, paying to Caesar... (Matt. 22:15-22).
- j. Widow’s mite (Mark 12:41-44).
- k. Massive stones in the temple (Matt. 24:1-2).
- l. With the towel and washbasin, He washed feet to illustrate humility (John 13:4-17).²⁰¹

Toward a Theology of Journey

After the Ascension of Jesus, the Disciples were left with a model for building the Kingdom. They were so deeply changed by their journeys with Jesus Christ that they continued to model the example of traveling together (at least in twos until a larger group could be formed) as they built the church. Robert Coleman describes this sweet quality of companionship as the Disciples continued the journey they had begun with Jesus:

Periods of travel were no interruption to their fellowship. On his trip to Caesarea, we are told that Peter was accompanied by some of the Christians of Joppa, along with the three men who had come to seek him (10:7, 23, 45; 11:12). Likewise Paul, when persecution became intolerable in Damascus, was escorted by Barnabas to Jerusalem (9:27), then taken by the brethren to Caesarea (9:30).... Moving about was a team exercise.... The principle of traveling together pertained to all the others, like Barnabas and Mark, Silas and Timothy, and Timothy and Erastus.... There was safety in numbers of course.... But more important, it facilitated fellowship in a natural setting. By teacher and pupil being together, they were continually able to learn in real laboratory of the world. Whatever happened along the way presented an occasion for teaching and reflection.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Zuck, 177.

²⁰² Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 58-59.

Coleman's, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism*, is perhaps one of the most helpful contemporary resource for understanding the principles regarding Jesus' personal evangelism. Coleman also illustrates the essence and importance of *timing*. Describing the scene of a painting which had a profound impact on him, he compares the scene to the nature of Jesus' heart for the lost and our commission to make disciples. The painting was of a boat which was battered by a storm like the one described in Mark 4, and it portrayed a survivor grasping for his companion after he had fallen in the raging waves:

... the survivor was holding on with only one hand, and with the other hand he was reaching down beneath the waves to lift up a sinking friend. That is the New Testament picture of evangelism—that hand reaching down to the lost with the offer of life.²⁰³

In the following paragraphs we will illustrate several parallel principles from Coleman's book with examples of how wilderness adventures or other types of experiential learning journeys are an effective way to introduce young people to Jesus Christ. Coleman highlights several narratives which illustrate how Jesus interacted with various kinds of people in real life situations; drawing out principles for evangelism. We will observe several principles of how the element of *timing* facilitates experiential learning in the wilderness.

In the wilderness, we experience real storms (as in the painting noted above). The guides or leaders of the wilderness experience often have the opportunity to be the hand "reaching beneath the waves to lift up a sinking friend."²⁰⁴ In the wilderness we feel *thirsty, hungry, scared*, etc. Activities like rock climbing create an environment of *fear, trust and accomplishment*. In the natural process of the *journey*, many opportunities arise to point young people to Jesus Christ who is the only One

²⁰³ Robert Coleman, *The Master's Personal Way of Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 10.

who can pull them up out of their waves, like Jesus did with Peter. The following categories will thus provide a general framework for understanding the *art* of guiding wilderness journeys from a Biblical perspective.

A Ministry of Active Listening

Spending hours or days with a group in the wilderness affords much time for asking questions and listening deeply to a person's soul. This is at the heart of *incarnational* evangelism. What a person offers in conversation is largely related to the level of safety they feel in the relationship. *Active listening* is a way for the listener to take captive one's thoughts to create space for genuinely listening to the other person. By seeking to understand a person's history and what has most shaped them, we offer a transforming gift. Coleman agrees: "Listening to people brings their gratitude and affection. It is also a good way to learn what is on their minds. Here is much of the secret of counseling and the sought-after friend."²⁰⁵

Discussions on the trail naturally arise out of shared experiences which happen each day. This provides opportunities for asking good questions: "Questions inviting personal opinion from listeners encourage people to think about what is said. It is a way of stimulating involvement, thus assuring greater application of the message."²⁰⁶ One of the most transforming aspects of any wilderness adventure is the opportunity each person has to share their "life story"; this a time for each person (within the safety of confidentiality) to share the milestones and memories of their lives. They are able to share what has most shaped them to be who they are today. They are also

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 49. See also John 4:1-42.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 69-70. Also See Luke 7:36-50.

able to share their sinful past²⁰⁷ which allows them in the context of community to experience forgiveness and meaningful hope through grieving, confession, being understood, and embracing the hope of a new future in Jesus Christ. And it allows time for others in the group to move toward the other, demonstrating genuine interest by asking meaningful questions. This is one of the most influential aspects of a trip.

A Ministry of Hospitality

The Apostle Peter's model for effective evangelism involved a commitment to the ministry of hospitality; "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9). *One of the most common ways of demonstrating hospitality is through sharing a meal:* "A good place to witness is around the dinner table. It is a natural setting for relaxed fellowship. It is also an ideal occasion to invite friends over for a visit."²⁰⁸ On wilderness adventures, meals are a community experience, usually sitting in a circle so that everyone can see each others eyes. Often after everyone is served we will ask a meal question to talk about the day or to get to know one another better.

Hospitality is a ministry of creating safe and welcoming environments where young people feel at home. We have found in our ministry with young people *that many of them may go a week or more without hearing their name called in an affectionate way.* Even this simple aspect of the journey where the leaders call everyone by name in an affectionate way day after day can cause a lasting impact. As cities become more violent, young people are feeling anxious and vulnerable. We have found on wilderness trips, ironically young people are often deeply affected by the sense of *safety* they feel in being a part of a caring group—even as they sleep in

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 139-140. See also Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:1-18.

the *unfamiliar* outdoors. As the group works, eats and rests together, a sense of safety and “home” is developed over the course of a few short days. For example, one activity most people associate with “home” is the telling of stories. Sharing stories around the camp fire at night or during a shared meal can be an intimate and enjoyable way to communicate truth verbally and non-verbally. Coleman asserts: “Everyone loves a story. Truth communicated through a parable is more readily perceived and applied.”²⁰⁹

Often well-meaning adults diminish the importance of “fun” in creating an environment of hospitality. Creating an environment of fun and humor on the journey can be like rain to a parched field. Humor allows a person to share deeply of themselves and to feel more connected to the group. Young people by and large are hurting from broken family relationships or lack of respect and tender love from the adults who mean the most to them. Jesus was concerned for the whole person: “Wherever one aches, there He ministers.”²¹⁰ An effective outdoor leader will be constantly aware of young people’s needs along the journey so that he or she can provide *practical help* (which is hospitality at its best):

Usually it involves some practical steps in communicating love. At least, every effort should be made to provide the best aid available in the way of human resources, whatever it takes. Here we are on the spot. What we do will not go unnoticed by God.²¹¹

The Art of Guiding

One can become overwhelmed with all of the aspects of guiding young people in the outdoors effectively. But similar to being a part of any guild, or learning a craft

²⁰⁸ Coleman *The Master's Personal Way of Personal Evangelism*, 69-70. Also See Luke 7:36-50.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 69-70. Also See Luke 7:36-50.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 79-80. See also Mark 2:1-12, Matthew 9:1-8, and Luke 5:17-26.

²¹¹ Ibid., 99. See also Matthew 8:5-13, and Luke 7:1-10.

or art, it takes time and practice to develop these skills. When one begins to learn an art, it is best learned by watching a master at work. Then we emulate what he does. In relational evangelism and experiential teaching, the skillful guide (a sort of “master” in their field) will repeat and amplify interpretation of Kingdom truths through the life situations that come along the way. And after a while our “followers” (apprentices) will grasp our priorities and begin to live by them.²¹² Similarly, Jesus modeled a way of engaging with different people along the journey; some were more tender, requiring gentleness, and others required more severity—as they were more strong-willed.²¹³

One aspect of the art of guiding is the *attitude in which we serve*. Jesus demonstrated a hopeful and encouraging attitude, especially as He ministered to tired or discouraged people. He emphasized “forgiveness, wholeness, and peace.”²¹⁴ Applying first aid to someone is a wonderful opportunity to identify compassionately with a person through a personal touch. This assures the patient that something is being done to alleviate the pain, whether it is physical or emotional, etc.²¹⁵

An irony in the art of guiding is that we have found that the more seasoned outdoor guides, rely more and more on the ministry of prayer in leading young people on wilderness adventures rather than activities. Seeking the mind of God on behalf of young people, and interceding for them in the spiritual realm is our greatest contribution to the transformation of the young. When a leader realizes that a young person really cannot help themselves²¹⁶ and needs the intervention of the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes a paramount discipline in the art of guiding.

²¹² Ibid., 161. See Also Luke 19:1-28.

²¹³ Ibid., 69-70. See Also Luke 7:36-50.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 79-80. See also Mark 2:1-12, Matthew 9:1-8, and Luke 5:17-26.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 89-90. See also John 9:1-38.

²¹⁶ Coleman, *The Master’s Way of Personal Evangelism*, 99. See also Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10.

Closure and Follow Up

Bringing closure to an adventure is necessary in *validating the experience as “real”* for each of the participants. Inadequate closure will cause young people to wonder or doubt whether what happened to them on the trail was more than just a mountain-top experience. We will discuss this aspect of the journey in more detail in chapter four, but from a literary point of view it is worth noting that this aspect of journey is affirmed by others. One of the ways we provide adequate closure is simply by allowing the group to encourage one another in the life-change or transformation they have witnessed in each other during the journey. We encourage each participant to verbally acknowledge the good qualities in one another. We find as well that commending others for their gifts and contributions strengthens our own witness²¹⁷ as we freely build up others and value them as they are created in the image of God.

Following up with young people after they go home is also essential in helping them mature and practically apply the decisions they have made to where they live. One of the critical aspects of our philosophy of journey is that the leaders who make contact with young people and build relationships with them in the city need to be the ones who *invite* them on a wilderness journey rather than *sending* them with someone else. Thus the leader brings the young person and then goes home with her to follow up long term. We find this in Paul’s own conversion experience. Coleman explains: “After Paul affirms Christ as Lord, the question of knowing His specific direction still remains. Here follow-up is essential.”²¹⁸ In a similar way, in following up, we need to view the goal of ministry with young people as bringing them *to maturity in Jesus Christ*. Young people are at a crucial stage in their maturity where they are making decisions about the frontiers of their lives:

²¹⁷ Ibid., 49. See also John 4:1-42.

Children become adults when the purpose of life is understood. This might be called the age of accountability. For some it may come much earlier than for others. It is the theoretical point in a child's development when the issue of God's claim upon one's life can be intelligently confronted.²¹⁸

Just as growth on a vine can vary in appearance, Roy Zuck describes some recognizable fruit of maturity in Jesus' disciples. According to Zuck's review of Jesus' teaching, spiritual fruit becomes mature or ripe as the believer grows by: 1) loving the Lord, 2) loving others, 3) obeying God's word, 4) doing good deeds, 5) by putting spiritual priorities first, 6) fellowshipping with God in prayer, 7) exercising faith in the Lord, 8) resisting temptation, 9) manifesting spiritual virtues.²¹⁹

The writer of Hebrews also provides timeless wisdom pertaining to the need for follow up. These principles apply to all stages of maturity:

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

Follow-up is possibly the most important aspect of the journey in order to help young people solidify decisions or commitments that they made in the wilderness. We find this social principle to be true especially among young people—that faith is *a group journey*. Again Coleman asserts:

Faith inspires faith. One person believing creates a positive climate that will influence others. Unbelief also tends to be contagious. Where there is massive doubt, as in Nazareth, miraculous works of God are rare.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Ibid., 139-140. See also Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:1-18.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 109-110. See also Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 19:13-15, and Luke 18:15-17.

²²⁰ Zuck, 94.

²²¹ Ibid., 99. See also Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10.

The Message of Jesus' Teaching

Why Jesus Taught (Motivation)

So far we have reviewed literature pertaining to how, when, and where Jesus taught. Forming a foundation for understanding the *setting* in which He taught will help us develop our theology of journey (chapters 4 and 5) and our project design (chapter 6), which is to *provide a contextual approach to building cross-cultural programs for developing leaders for the city in the wilderness*. We will round out our review of the experiential nature of Jesus Christ's teaching and training methods by briefly annotating a body of literature relevant to the topic of *what* (interpretation) Jesus taught and *why* (motivation) He taught.

There are a myriad of commentaries interacting with *interpretations* of Jesus' sayings. This theme would carry us beyond the scope of our thesis, but in a few words we are able to observe from this body of research a compelling argument for the *purpose* of Jesus' teaching and *practical application* thereof which was intended for the original audience. In this section, we will look primarily at *why* He chose to use parables and other figures of speech to teach His disciples and the masses. If we understand *why* He used these forms of communication, we are able to discover principles to guide us toward more effective models of discipleship through carefully and artfully crafted modes of experiential learning. First we will look at *why* He taught the way He did, to form an understanding of *what motives inspire life-transformation teaching*.

The Gospel writers themselves often indicate the intended setting and application of Jesus' teaching.²²² C.H. Dodd provides two guiding principles in the

²²² Dodd, 14.

process of critiquing the form of Jesus' teaching to scrutinize the *original setting*:²²³

1) Our best guide to discovering what was most likely in the minds of the hearers of Jesus is the Old Testament which we presume to have been familiar to His audience, i.e. agrarian images of the fields, vineyards, etc. 2) The meaning we attribute to the saying or parable we teach must be congruent with Jesus' own interpretation of the saying—in other words it must fit the general view of all of His teaching.²²⁴ F.F. Bruce asserts: The purpose of Jesus' teaching was often to shock His audience awake with the reality of their situation:

He comes to us in parables because we have a tendency to look without seeing and listen without hearing or catching on.... Jesus draws us pictures—He stages little dramas for us—because He wants to make us well.²²⁵

In most cases,

Parables don't give us the specifics about what must be rejected, nor do they tell us the precise content of the new discovery. What they do tell us is that the discovery is so overwhelming that it shatters the routines that characterized our old way of living.... Jesus is not talking about reform, but about transformation.²²⁶

In other words, parables can be viewed as a sort of literary “Trojan Horse”²²⁷ the truth is hidden in them, and the truth inside them wars against the status quo.

Similarly, A.B. Bruce asserts, “The direct, primary aim of all Christ's teaching was to illuminate human minds and to soften human hearts.”²²⁸ He used parables to clearly indicate to each hearer the reality of their position toward or against Him, i.e. to “separate wheat from chaff.”²²⁹ Every parable was hard to contradict; it was meant

²²³ Ibid., 18.

²²⁴ Ibid., 18.

²²⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, 26.

²²⁶ Clarence and Doulos Jordan; Bill Lane, *Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1976), 20.

²²⁷ Ibid., 38.

²²⁸ A.B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ; A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of our Lord* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and son, 1882), 22.

²²⁹ Ibid., 18.

to evoke a response, to strike a verdict, to make people think by *appealing to their intelligence through the imagination.*²³⁰

Jesus' various utterances, similar to the prophets of antiquity, are like a slow-moving glacier marking the terrain of humankind's soul beneath the surface. It may at first seem like a daunting challenge to an outdoor leader, to first discern the motives of his audience in order to speak or teach with words on target. But we can be comforted in the Apostle Paul's wisdom that, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man (1 Cor.10:13)." Thus by knowing the deceitfulness and brokenness of our own lives, we can assume that our audience shares similar patterns of unbelief, temptation, and sin. By being personally vulnerable with our own common temptations, we are more able to offer grace to others who all share in the same brokenness. As we are all created in the image of God, and we are also equally fallen, we are able to know the motivations (holy and unholy) of our audience, because in general, we all share the same motivations. So the motive and heart *in the wake* of what He said is the key to understanding parables:

The parables were neither deliberate mystifications, nor idle intellectual conceits, nor mere literary products of aesthetic taste: they were the utterances of a sorrowful heart. And herein lies their chief charm: not in the doctrine they teach, though that is both interesting and important; not in their literary beauty, thought that is great; but in the sweet delicate odour of human pathos that breathes from them as from alpine wild flowers. That He had to speak in parables was one of the burdens of the Son of Man, to be placed side by side with the fact that He had nowhere to lay His head.²³¹

Like the prophets, Jesus' *sorrow* motivated Him to take care in piercing through the openings of His audience's outward armor which resisted Him. Jesus knew His audience's state of being; He knew the world they lived in, He was familiar with the real life situations of those He taught. Thus, His sorrow for the listeners

²³⁰ Hunter, 14.

caused Him to masterfully weave together the form and content of His message within the real life setting in which He stood, so that *the message would powerfully work into the most guarded barriers of hardened human hearts.*

What Jesus Taught: The Content of His Teaching

As mentioned in the introduction of this section, resources to study the content of Jesus' teaching are widely available. We will provide only a brief summary of some of the literature on this topic. One of the most common topics in which Jesus taught was prayer; and the content of His teaching on prayer largely relates to trust and waiting on God, rather than getting something as a result of prayer. A.B. Bruce notes that "overall, Jesus teaches them no philosophy of waiting on God, but only tells them that they shall not wait in vain."²³² In other words, prayer changes us, we do not change God.

Another common theme of Jesus' teaching was grace. The parables of grace, as noted by Bruce bring a new message of good news:

Christ's preaching was the dawn of the era of grace, when the Dayspring from on high visited this world, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace....' in many of the parables belonging to the class now to be considered, there is a striking union of the true, the good, the beautiful.²³³

T.W. Manson divides the content of Jesus teaching into categories. First, Jesus taught about *God as Father*, "By what he is, he makes the Father real to men. By being the Son he reveals the Father, so that men see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."²³⁴ Second, the teach that *God is King*:

²³¹ A.B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teachings of Christ; A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of our Lord*, 23.

²³² A.B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, 62-63.

²³³ A.B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ; A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of our Lord*, 230.

²³⁴ Manson, 113.

In the two Seed parables the emphasis is on the fact that the Kingdom grows; in the parable of the leaven it is on the manner of the growth. It is a ferment which gradually penetrates until it affects the whole. That is to say, those who are already of the Kingdom are to the world what leaven is to dough.²³⁵

Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom is directed toward producing those qualities of loyalty, trust, and obedience in His followers.²³⁶

Robert Stein gives a brief history of how parables have been interpreted in the past two hundred years to show the progress of contemporary research in helping us understand the purpose of Jesus' parables.²³⁷ Toward the end of the twentieth century, Adolf Julicher's research on the parables of Jesus led him to a perspective that within each parable was one main point. He urged students of Scripture not to seek allegorical significance in the details of the parables unless it was absolutely necessary.²³⁸ Later in the early twenty first century, C.H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias focused their parable research on seeking to understand the original setting (*sitz en leben*) in which the parable was uttered. What Dodd did in a preliminary way, Jeremias carried out systematically with more detail than Dodd.²³⁹ In the mid-1950's, Hans Conzelmann and Willi Marxsen conducted their parable research through the filter of the redaction criticism method which was a popular technique at the time. They sought to understand how the evangelist who wrote the parable would have interpreted it.²⁴⁰ Dodd began to discuss these ideas but did not develop them fully.

Contemporary parable research can be understood in three main categories. Structural analysis seeks to understand deep structures of meaning below the surface of the narrative. Aesthetic criticism is concerned with the larger units and the surface

²³⁵ Ibid., 133.

²³⁶ Ibid., 198.

²³⁷ Robert Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981) 56-70. We paraphrased a series of citations.

²³⁸ Ibid., 56-70.

²³⁹ Ibid., 59.

level of the text. This method seeks to understand the text in light of literary forms and paradigms (humor, tragedy, analogy, simile, etc.).²⁴¹ According to Stein, the view today is that parables are not limited to a single meaning or point as Julicher, Dodd, and Jeremias maintain: “Since the way in which parables became language events is different for each hearer or reader, the meaning of the same parable will of necessity also be different for each individual.”²⁴² In other words contemporary exegetes are encourage to focus more holistically with special attention to what God is *saying to us* in the parable. A balanced perspective in *exegesis* will protect modern interpreters from missing the literary and historical context of the parables while remaining open to the Holy Spirit as He translates the principles of each parable into one’s contemporary context where we can practically apply what God speaks to us.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 62.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 65.

²⁴² Ibid., 67.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The emphasis of chapter two's literary review was largely to describe the ways in which Jesus masterfully used the immediate surroundings in His experientially-oriented teaching. Chapter three will review literature highlighting contemporary views of the experiential learning process. Most experiential educators would agree that, "Education at its best takes place when teacher and pupil can live together, experiencing practical truth in the context of love and understanding."²⁴³ Similarly, according to the Scripture, Jesus Christ strategically planned *well-timed stress experiences* (or adventure) to evoke sincere disciples to ask questions—helping them to understand His call on their lives. We have many examples of Jesus employing this strategy. Once, when the disciples were tired from a night of fishing, Jesus told them to go out again and drop their nets. This heightened their learning curve, since they were *tired, frustrated, and ready to quit*. Yet when they pulled in the large catch of fish, they learned a life-changing lesson. Luke writes, "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man! (Luke 5:8)." Then Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men (Luke 5:10)."

The stress of this experience *prepared* him to be changed. Somehow a great catch of fish, which should have been reason for a celebration, brought Peter to utter despair over the sinfulness of his heart—to the point of brokenness. Yet Jesus restored him to a new position, not as a fisherman but as a *fisher of men*. Then, rather than throwing a

party or cashing in on the value of the fish, Peter left his nets to follow Jesus. Peter had gone out to catch fish and failed; Jesus went out to *catch him* and succeeded. What would have made a worldly man rich (i.e. the packed net of fish), made Peter recognize his poverty; as he died to himself, he answered the invitation of new life in following Jesus Christ.

Another example of how Jesus crafted *well-timed stress experiences* was when He sent the Twelve out in a boat to encounter a storm. He watched and waited until they were tired. Then He walked out to them to speak life-changing truth into their lives. And again during a similar storm, Jesus slept peacefully in the boat while the Disciples bailed and rowed for their lives. Jesus waited until the *timing* was right. His example models the principle that *stress heightens learning*. Jesus' message often propelled the disciples toward life-changing belief through the medium of stress like a sailboat propelled forward by its sails full of a strong wind.

The power of learning in the context of real world experiences overwhelmingly outweighs the effectiveness of teaching in the classroom. The genius of Jesus' experiential learning is in how He *showed* His disciples the truth, and how He *gave* them truth through well-timed stressful experiences:

His strategy was to prepare a nucleus of laborers for the harvest.... To show what He meant, Jesus gathered His disciples around Him while He ministered to the world. Hence a few were always learning by observation.²⁴³

Similar to Robert Coleman, Leighton Ford asserts that leaders in ministry need to view themselves as Shepherd-Makers. When we look at how Jesus developed undershepherds we see that He shared everything with them: a shared life, a shared goal, a

²⁴³ Coleman, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism*, 26.

shared partnership, shared time, shared learning, shared risks, shared future, and shared power.²⁴⁵

In *Teaching to Change Lives*, Howard Hendricks provides similar principles that are true about education. He is convinced that experiential learning is the key to the process of effecting life-change. Many of the principles in his book are excellent. Yet we find that the activity/experiential side of education illustrated in his book, still involves primarily contrived experiences created in the classroom or through engaging the imagination; whereas the setting of Jesus' teaching is more often described in the midst of real-life experiences outdoors—not a classroom environment. Although we agree on the same principles, our assertion is that transformational teaching in the outdoors may have unparalleled effectiveness compared to the classroom environment. We assert that more attention must be given to teaching along the journey, especially in the outdoors.

Ironically it is widely agreed that the element of stress or tension (which rarely happens in the classroom) is a component in the educational process which heightens learning:

There is no growth, there is no development, there is no learning... without tension. Tension is absolutely indispensable to the process. To be sure, too much tension leads to frustration, stress, anxiety. But too little tension produces apathy. So God moves into our lives by divine design, to periodically disturb our equilibrium. That's how he develops us.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁵ Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership; Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values & Empowering Change* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 199-221.

²⁴⁶ Hendricks, 58.

Hendricks believes that stringing teachable moments together is the mark of good teaching methodology.²⁴⁷ Getting people involved in the learning process also increases learning... “We learn by doing the right things.”²⁴⁸ Emotional involvement is also a key ingredient in the learning process: “The most effective communication always includes an emotional ingredient—the feeling factor, the excitement element.”²⁴⁹

Sherwood and Judith Lingenfelter have served for many years as missionaries on the island of Yap, near the Philippines. During their missionary service, they conducted extensive research on the Yapese learning process as well as cultural considerations in their learning styles. Their contribution to our thesis lies in the principles of experiential learning in the cross-cultural context, which we believe are also relevant for crossing subcultures, i.e. youth culture in any given culture. In *Teaching Cross-Culturally; An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching*, they state their thesis: “The teacher’s role is to create the most appropriate context within which students can learn.”²⁵⁰

The Lingenfelters cite a study performed by Stephen Harris in 1984, on Australian Aboriginal culture. He observed the difference between *learning by doing*, i.e. real life situations, vs. *contrived situational learning*. He notes, “Aborigines learn through real-life activities rather than by practicing in contrived settings.”²⁵¹ He observed, “A large gap often exists between the time when the observation begins and when the skill is exercised. A person may watch a skill for weeks before attempting

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 60.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 78-80.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 101.

²⁵⁰ Judith and Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally; An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 37.

it.”²⁵² He was able to distinguish between learning by observation versus learning by imitation: “Observation may take place over a long period of time, whereas with imitation, the task is immediately applied. Harris says, “one imitates a person who one admires.”²⁵³ These assertions support the criticism at the outset of our thesis that *modern teaching focuses more on rhetoric rather than setting*. Lingenfelter writes:

A colleague of mine who teaches in Africa tells of trying to teach basketball to his students. He could never get them to run drills.... The only way they could really learn to play basketball was by playing the game. They had to learn in the activity rather than in a contrived setting.... People who learn best in real-life situations find it difficult to transfer the process from one context to another.²⁵⁴

Our observations indicate that young people, in general, respond better to concrete experiential teaching rather than abstract classroom-teaching. Thus instruction in real-life settings is best for learning:

We propose that good teaching in any culture will include traditional learning techniques and that a teacher who wants to be a Christ-like servant in a cross-cultural setting will try to make learning as context specific and real to life as possible. To achieve this we must include learning by observation and imitation, learning by trial and error, learning through real-life activities, and learning in context-specific settings.²⁵⁵

Missionaries like the Lingenfelters advocate our assertion that a paradigm shift in teaching toward more experiential techniques is needed today. Lee Wanak, in his article: *Theological Education and the Role of Teachers in the 21st Century; A look at the Asia Pacific Region*, agrees:

Teaching students to think creatively and critically, rather than spoon feeding answers is the key in preparing 21st century leaders.... Education involves more

²⁵² Ibid., 36.

²⁵³ Ibid., 37.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 40.

than the cognitive domain, it is also affective, involving the shaping of values, attitudes, and emotions.²⁵⁶

Some of the key components of experiential learning are: *doing* and *reflecting on what happened during the experience*.²⁵⁷ It also encompasses a wide variety of strategies from apprenticeships, wilderness adventures, field projects, mission trips, field trips, simulations, games, etc.²⁵⁸

Lingenfelter notes honestly that one of the potential weaknesses of experiential learning is its “focus on experience and emotional responses, rather than on information.”²⁵⁹ Although we agree this is a potential weakness, we believe this potential weakness is most probable in *contrived situations* and less likely to occur in the midst of real life situational teaching. For instance, when teaching parables, etc. in the natural environment, (as noted in the previous section... which works with unchanging symbols from the natural world) then one can *prevent the experience from defining reality based on emotion* so that the emotional connection with the subject becomes a *catalyst* for learning.²⁶⁰ This is less likely to occur in a classroom, where emotional engagement is more likely to be linked to a contrived setting, or through effective use of media or rhetoric.

The Effects of Urbanization

One of the most significant macro developments in human civilization is the migration toward the cities in the past one hundred years. Greenway and Monsma, citing

²⁵⁶ Lee Wanak, "Theological Education and the Role of Teachers in the 21st Century: A Look at the Asia Pacific Region," *Journal of Asian Mission*, no. 2/1 (2000): 8-9.

²⁵⁷ Lingenfelter, 90.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 90: We have added wilderness and mission trips in this list.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 93.

the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects, write: "By 2006, half of the world population is expected to be urban dwellers. The urban population is growing three times faster than its rural counterpart. By 2030, three of every five persons will be living in urban areas."²⁶¹ The whole range of human experience is shifting from a rural/agrarian civilization to an urban experience and mind set. For this reason we believe it is all the more important to provide young people with experiences in the outdoors enjoying the beauty of creation; where God's fingerprints are naturally more visible. Several astonishing statistics contribute to our concern and thus fuel our active pursuit to promote more ministries in the outdoors. According to a 2005 *Christian Century* report,

1 million people worldwide move to cities each week; 2007 is the estimated year when the world's population will be divided equally between rural and urban areas, 1 in 3 urban folks will live in poverty by the year 2007, according to the United Nations estimate, 80% of South Americans live in cities (the highest rate in the world); 35.5 percent of them live in slums.²⁶²

Wilderness.net has researched the use of wilderness in North America over the past four decades and their findings indicate that as America becomes more urbanized, the hunger for wilderness experiences among Americans has continued to grow. They conclude: "Recreational use of Wilderness has increased 10 times in the past 40 years and more than 12 million people now visit Wilderness each year as of 2004.... Half of all Wilderness areas are within a day's drive of America's 30 largest cities."²⁶³ The following map illustrates the location of American wildlands and their proximity to cities.

²⁶⁰ Hendricks, 125.

²⁶¹ Roger Greenway and Timothy Monsma, *Cities; Missions New Frontier*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, 13.

²⁶² Editor, "Urban Realities," *Christian Century* (October 18 2005): 7.

²⁶³ *Wilderness.net*. "The National Wilderness Preservation System." www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse+NWPS&sec=threats/ (accessed 11/18/2005).

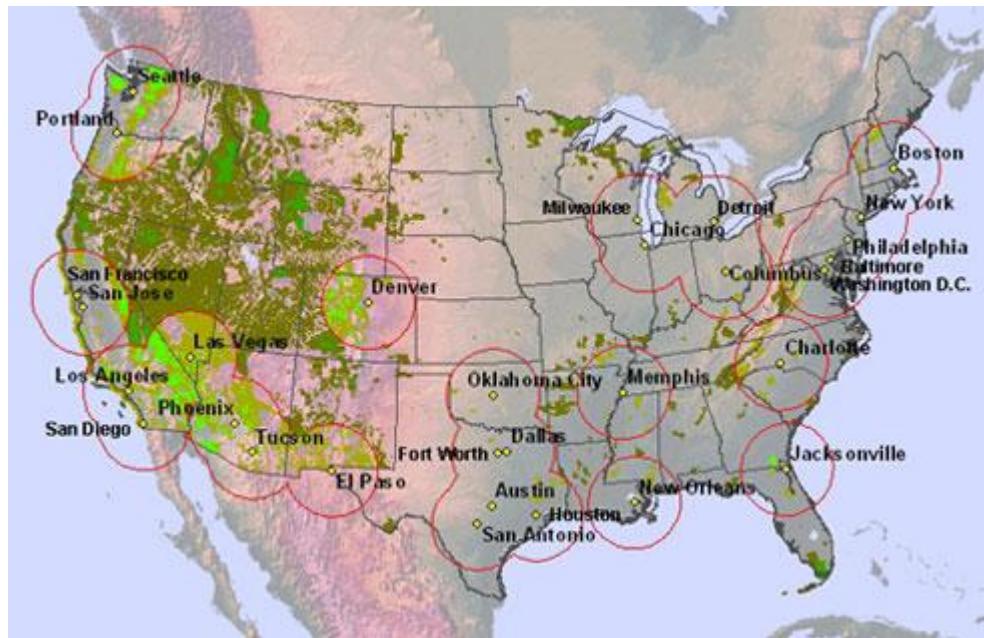


Figure 1 Location of American wildlands and their proximity to cities

Key

- 150-mile radius around America's largest cities
- Wilderness areas within 150 miles of one or more of America's largest cities
- Wilderness areas not within 150 miles of any of America's largest cities
- Other public lands* within 150 miles of one or more of America's largest cities
- Other public lands* not within 150 miles of any of America's largest cities

* BLM, FWS, FS, NPS land only²⁶⁴

McCloskey and Spalding also provide a macro view of wilderness on a global scale. They write:

The findings suggest one-third of the global land surface still is wilderness.... However, 41% of the amount is in the Arctic or Antarctic and 20% in temperate regions. Most of the settled continents are between one-fourth and one-third

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

wilderness. Europe being the exception. Only a small share of this wilderness has been given protected status.²⁶⁵

Figure 1 above illustrates more city dwellers (in America) are seeking opportunities for retreat in the wilderness. In order for young people to be able to enjoy untrammeled pristine wilderness experiences, transportation will be a key issue to be addressed as well as extra time for travel for volunteer leaders who organize these experiences in the outdoors for their groups of young people.

The *United Nations Environment Programme* conducted an extensive study called *Global Environment Outlook-1* where they analyzed several global trends emerging from a diverse sampling of regions. This study highlights several key global and regional environmental concerns; prioritizing them for the current situation as well as the future.

Here are a few of the more poignant observations:

1. The use of renewable resources-land, forest, fresh water, coastal areas, fisheries, and urban air-is beyond their natural regeneration capacity and therefore is unsustainable.
2. Natural areas and the biodiversity they contain are diminishing due to the expansion of agricultural land and human settlements.
3. Rapid unplanned urbanization, particularly in coastal areas, is putting major stress on adjacent ecosystems.²⁶⁶

Thus they provide the following summary:

There are also widespread social trends, intrinsically linked to the environment, that have negative feedback effects on environmental trends, notably:

1. A continuation, at least in the near future, of hunger and poverty despite the fact that globally enough food is available; and
2. Greater human health risks resulting from continued resource degradation and chemical pollution.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Michael J. McCloskey and Heather Spalding, "A Reconnaissance-Level Inventory of the Amount of Wilderness Remaining in the World." *AMBIOS* 18, no. 4 (1989): 221.

²⁶⁶ *Global Environment Outlook-1*. "Geo-1: United Nations Environment Programme." 1997. www-cger.nies.go.jp/geo1/misc/about.htm. (accessed 11/18/2005).

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

The remedy they prescribe is worth mentioning here because of the surprisingly spiritual nature of the rhetoric they employ in their executive summary: “To achieve advances in one or all of these areas of action, a change in the ‘hearts and minds’ of everyone will be required, along with a world-wide transition towards equity and resource efficiency.”²⁶⁸ This is hopeful for our thesis in that our belief is that outdoor leadership can be a strategy in developing leaders who will be able to cross over secular and religious lines. Interest in the outdoor environment can be a starting point to promote dialogue which will hopefully lead constituents to an encounter with Jesus Christ. For instance, the *Geo-1* report states that their goal is to promote, “Improved human and ecosystem health and well-being”²⁶⁹ which for followers of Jesus Christ is also clearly a characteristic of the Kingdom of God. Figure 2 below illustrates this principle that outdoor leadership strategy can serve to cross secular lines and provide a bridge for the gospel. We particularly note the parallel of the “Impacts”²⁷⁰ column to a principle of the Kingdom of God:

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., “Figure 6 The Action Cycle”.

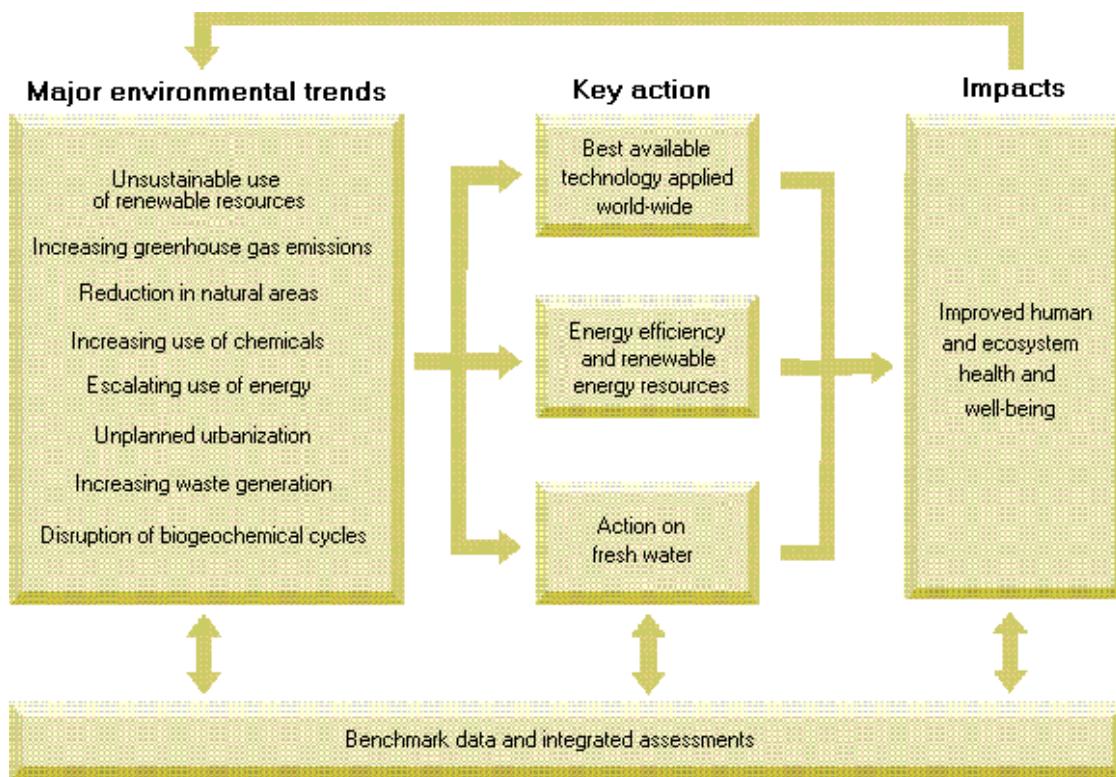


Figure 2 Major environmental trends; “The Action Cycle

The *Geo-1 Executive Summary* states the challenge posed by mass urbanization in the following statement:

Poverty, burgeoning population growth, the inefficient use of resources, high levels of consumption, waste generation, and industrial pollution are some of the key factors leading to this continuous degradation [of the global environment]....If one were to distill four key priority areas that emerge from the GEO-1 Report for immediate, enhanced, and concerted action by the international community, energy, environmentally sound technologies, fresh water, and benchmark data [assessments] are obvious choices.²⁷¹

To further highlight the actual situation of global land use, the next two figures (Figure 3 and 4) highlight national and international protected areas in Asia, the Pacific,²⁷² and

²⁷¹ Ibid., *Executive Summary; The Way Ahead*: 4.

²⁷² Ibid., Figure 2.9: National and international protection of natural areas in Asia and the Pacific. Source: WCMC (1995); Australia: State of the Environment 1996 report. Notes: Protected areas include areas falling within World Conservation Union (IUCN) protected area categories I-V.

Europe.²⁷³ It is interesting to note that New Zealand is leading the way in protected wilderness areas for public enjoyment. Yet to be fair, compared to many of the other countries in the region, New Zealand is still relatively under-populated in that the resources available compared to the current population provide ample opportunity for environmental stewardship.

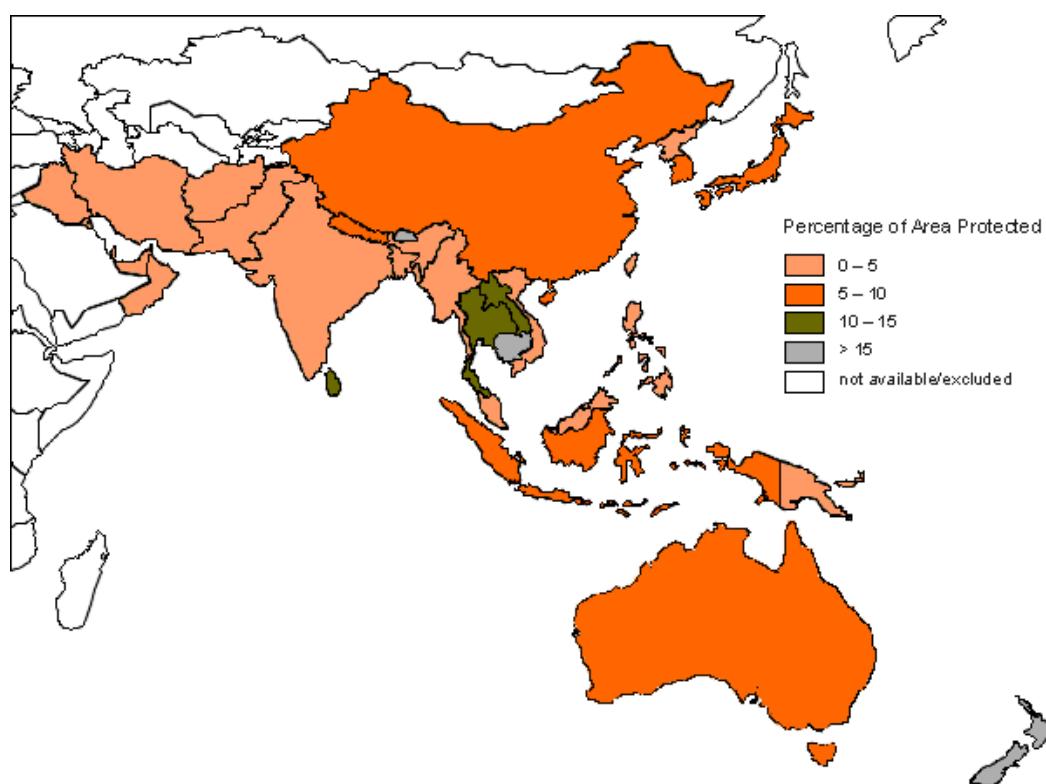


Figure 3 National and international protection of natural areas in Asia and the Pacific

²⁷³ Ibid., Figure 2.10 National and international protection of natural areas in Europe and the CIS countries. Source: WCMC (no date). Notes: About 2 per cent of the part of Russia not portrayed in this map is covered by protected areas.

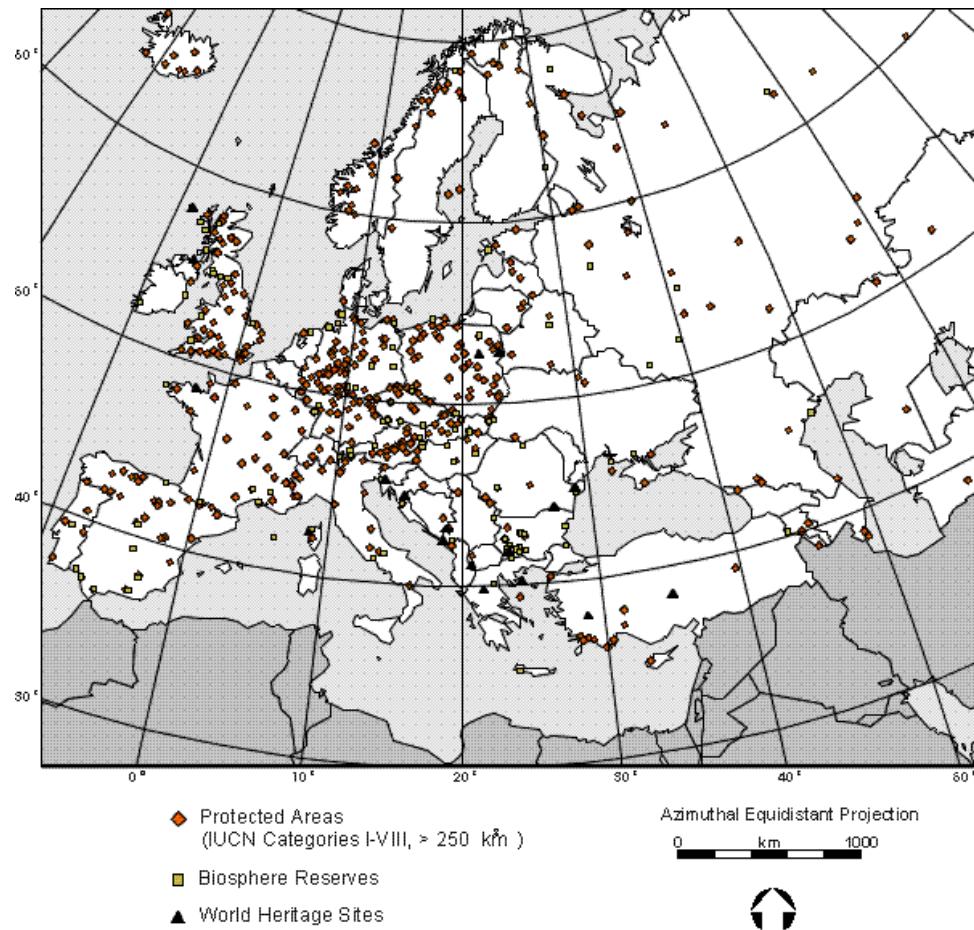


Figure 4 National/International protection areas in Europe and the CIS countries

The next figure (Figure 5)²⁷⁴ shows the non-domesticated land as a percentage of total regional land area in the world. It is interesting to note that Africa will have the lowest percentage of non-domesticated land by 2050:

²⁷⁴ *Geo-1: United Nations Environment Programme*, 1997, "Global Environment Outlook-1: Pressures On Natural Habitats; Projected Pressures On Natural Habitats," http://www-cger.nies.go.jp/geo1/tabc4_6.htm. (accessed April 10, 2006).

Region	1990	2015	2050
Africa	70	55	45
Asia & Pacific	60	50	55
Europe & former USSR	75	75	70
Latin America & Caribbean	70	65	60
North America	80	80	80
West Asia	90	75	70
World	70	65	60

Figure 5 Non-domesticated land as a % of total regional land area in the world

As we consider the effects of urbanization upon peoples and societies, Ray Bakke has provided keen insight into a theology of the city which will help us see the connection between urbanization and the necessity for developing young leaders who have a city-vision. Bakke asserts, according to God's pronouncement to Israel, in Ezekiel 16:48-50, *the key to reaching the world is the city; and the key to the city is the poor.*²⁷⁵ Most city leaders would agree that their greatest concern is how to care for the poor of our cities. From our experience working with city leaders, if the believing community in a city can provide answers and practical action to address the needs of the poor, then the city leaders will generally be grateful for and thus support the work of the faith community.²⁷⁶ The city will be blessed and thus deep inroads for the Kingdom will be possible. Bakke further comments on the alarming message of Ezekiel 16 and its relevance for visionary city-leaders today. Israel's is similar to the sin plaguing many cities today:

²⁷⁵ Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 42. Note: Ezekiel 16:48-50 reads: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor or needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen."

²⁷⁶ Don Reeverts, interview by Ashley Denton, June 2, 2006, transcript, Denver Leadership Foundation, Denver, CO.

The rich were getting richer and were proud of their extravagant surpluses while the poor were getting poorer.... If you are honest, you will confess, as I do, that we know of no city where the gap is not widening. That, my friend, is the most Biblical sign that your city is in grave danger of God's judgment.²⁷⁷

If we are to combat the ills of urbanization, Isaiah 65 provides a theological framework describing the key components of the “city” that God is building:

1. Public celebrations and happiness (vv. 17-25)
2. Public health for children and aged (v. 20)
3. Housing for all (v. 21)
4. Family support systems (v. 23)
5. Absence of violence (v. 25)²⁷⁸

In chapters four and five we will explore more fully how the wilderness has always been a special place that God has used to transform young leaders to have a vision to reach their city.

Experiential Learning

Research and Theory

Extensive literature is available regarding the use of wilderness for personal growth, therapy, education, and leadership development. One study, citing 247 such bodies of literature reported that the findings tend to support the view that: “Participation in wilderness experience programs results in positive benefits, such as enhanced self esteem and sense of personal control, and negative results from participation are virtually non-existent.”²⁷⁹ One of the key elements which facilitate life-changing experiential learning events is the element of setting. Simon Beames emphasizes: “Placing

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 82-83. Scripture reference from Isaiah 65:17-25.

²⁷⁹ Russel Troy and Keith Moore, *Studies of the Use of Wilderness for Personal Growth, Therapy, Education, and Leadership Development: An Annotation and Evaluation* (Moscow: University of Idaho, College of Natural Resources, 2002), Wilderness Research Center: 1.

participants in a novel setting is central to the theoretical foundations of outdoor education.... Being in a novel environment adds to the participants' feelings of disequilibrium as they experience a heightened sense of arousal.”²⁸⁰ Luckner and Nadler agree: “The more powerful, significant or varied the experience or stimuli which initiated the learning, the stronger and more numerous are the synaptic connections, resulting in better understanding.”²⁸¹ They suggest that activities which promote learning are those which are more ‘lifelike’, and those which are processed well in order to extract personal meaning.²⁸² Or in other words, Jim Schoel and Richard Maizell understand the experiential learning process as an “adventure wave” where one enters the adventure wave through a “briefing”, the wave rises as learning rises through “doing”, and the wave recycles by “debriefing” the experience.²⁸³

Peter November conducted a study to see how learners reflected on their own experiences to understand more fully the positive benefits of experiential learning techniques. Through analyzing the participant’s journal entries, November’s objective was to help students identify and develop their own experiential learning processes. So after each experiential exercise he had the students take time to write in their journals. Several students developed different ways of processing their experience. After a period of time he asked them to categorize how they most effectively evaluated their experiences through journaling. One student wrote: “Lesson, Impression, Speculation,

²⁸⁰ Beames, 147.

²⁸¹ John Luckner, Reldan Nadler. *Processing the Experience; Strategies to Enhance and Generalize Learning* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1997), 11.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Jim Schoel; Richard S. Maizell. *Exploring Islands of Healing; New Perspectives on Adventure Based Counseling* (Beverly: J. Weston Walch, 2002), 165-282.

and Application.”²⁸⁴ Another student wrote: “Concrete Experience, Observation, NTI (Next Time I’ll...).”²⁸⁵ This study is especially relevant to wilderness experiences in that it shows the benefit of journaling to process experiences as well as to give some guidance as to a variety of ways one can use their journals to evaluate their experiences to discover what they are learning.

An interesting pattern developed in Keijo Erickson’s study of a group of students enrolled in a religious education course in Sweden. His objective was to discover what was most important to young people in order to determine the kinds of experiences he could develop to teach and challenge his students in the areas which were of most concern. When the group of students was asked to write about what was most important to them in life, the following categories emerged (in order of popularity):

1. Family
2. Education
3. Social concerns
4. Leisure time
5. Sympathy and understanding
6. The environment
7. Health and keeping fit
8. Religion
9. Death
10. The joy of growing up and the satisfaction of making progress
11. Peace
12. Security in one’s social environment²⁸⁶

Providing further synthesis, the three main categories of greatest concern for this group of adolescents were:

²⁸⁴ Peter November, "Learning to Teach Experientially: A Pilgrim's Progress." *Studies in Higher Education* 22, no. 3 (October 97): HTML, http://web28.epnet.com/citation.asp?tb=1&_ug=sid+9327D9A8%2D178F%2D4CEB/ (accessed 11/16/2005): 7.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 8.

²⁸⁶ Keijo Eriksson, "In Search of the Meaning of Life: A study of the Ideas of Senior Compulsory School Pupils on Life and its Meaning in an Experiential Learning Context." *British Journal of Religious Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 120.

1. Individuals and their relationships
2. Society
3. The concept of God and religion²⁸⁷

Several implications of this study may be noted:

Experiences and thoughts should be brought forward, to be used later as the basis for the planning and execution of teaching; it is important to allow pupils—particularly boys—to develop their cognitive processes through practising writing on topics which force them to explain and defend their opinions and convictions; that it is important to let the pupils' reflective thoughts in writing from the basis of teaching content.... Only girls wrote about security in relationships with others.²⁸⁸

Thus in terms of experiential learning through wilderness adventures we can make the following suggestions for ways outdoor leaders can enhance the learning process for participants: 1. Prioritize talking with young people about their *fears and expectations* before they set out on a trip, then use what young people share in developing content/teaching topics through the week. 2. Develop trail quiet times to suit girls by developing questions which explore issues of *relationships and security* and to suit boys by crafting questions to probe their *opinions and convictions*. 3. Boys *especially* need to be encouraged to *journal*. 4. Incorporate *meal discussions* into the daily routine of the wilderness journey. Meal times are an opportune time to give young people a chance to share what they have written in their journals. In addition to helping young people solidify what they are thinking and feeling, this also will help the outdoor leader establish relevant content related to that which most young people are concerned.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 122-123.

Wilderness/Outdoor Education: Specific Research

In 1996 a gathering of wilderness and outdoor education specialists gathered at the *Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute* in Bradford Woods, Indiana to explore the essentials of what composes an authentic wilderness experience. After the papers and lectures were presented, a smaller group wrote a report to describe several elements which most outdoor education specialists agreed were the essential components of an authentic wilderness experience. Although this was a secular gathering, their findings coincide with our theological study of the transformational character of wilderness experiences.

The first characteristic identified was the way wilderness experiences develop *humility* in participants. They wrote, "Wilderness is a great leveler, reminding us, perhaps, of our rightful place within the natural world, and engendering an intellectual humility."²⁸⁹ Secondly is the aspect of *primitiveness*, which is a quality of experience most city dwellers rarely experience. As an example of this, the authors quoted Thoreau to illustrate the meaning of "primitiveness": "I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life . . . I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life...."²⁹⁰ Although this is a very humanistic description, we agree that living in the primitive sense does confront the wilderness traveler regarding the essentials of life.

A Young Life staff member who served as a wilderness guide for high school young

²⁸⁹ William Borrie and Joseph Roggenbuck, "Providing an Authentic Wilderness Experience? Thinking beyond the Wilderness Act of 1964." In *Coalition for Education in the Outdoors Third Research Symposium Proceedings held in Bradford Woods, IN, January 12-14, 1996*, edited by Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, 34-44. : U.S. Department of Education Educational Resources Information Center, 1996: 35.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 36. Quoting Henry David Thoreau, 1854.

people in Colorado during 2000-2003, communicates well the effect wilderness has on one's understanding of God:

Being on the trail created raw space for God to work in me and the girls that I guided like nothing else has. I was face to face with myself and face to face with the wildness and adventure of Jesus. The climb doesn't just teach you, it changes you and makes you into more; it forces you to move. I was honored to watch transformation not only in myself, but also within the lives of dozens of teenagers.²⁹¹

Third, we encounter an element of *timelessness* in the wilderness which confronts the idol of busyness that poisons the roots of community and fellowship—especially in Western society where personal progress and ambition is usually valued more than relationships:

Wilderness provides an opportunity to leave behind the frantic pace of modern life, and to experience a far less controlled and perhaps unmeasured pace. Some may find a natural affinity with the ancient rhythms of life, the cycles of the seasons, and the day/night patterns of light, temperature, and activity.... Olsen, for example, was convinced that given sufficient time, all visitors to wilderness can experience timelessness and that as they 'accept the time clock of wilderness, their lives become entirely different. It is one of the great compensations of primitive experience, and when one finally reaches the point where days are governed by daylight and dark, rather than schedules, where one eats if hungry and sleeps when tired, and becomes completely immersed in the ancient rhythms, then one begins to live.'²⁹²

Another female guide from the Rocky Mountain Region Backcountry program provides a vivid description of how one's view of community is profoundly changed through small group adventures in the wilderness:

One of my favorite things about the trail is the community it brings. Defenses come down. Barriers are breached. Authentic relationship is possible. Once you get a taste of that, reality changes. Your expectations are higher. Desire comes alive. In this post-modern culture, often marked by isolation and loneliness, the community formed on a backpacking trip meets the core hunger of both teens and adults today.²⁹³

²⁹¹ Rickelle Smyth, interview by Ashley Denton, April, 2004, email.

²⁹² Borrie and Roggenbuck, 37.

²⁹³ Cara Alexander, interview by Ashley Denton, April, 2004, email.

A similar quality to timelessness which the symposium identified as a critical aspect of an authentic wilderness experience is *solitude*.²⁹⁴ The psalmist declares that because God cares for His creation, He desires for His people to experience solitude so that their lives are fueled by His pleasure toward them. We hear the Words of our Creator-God in the psalm: “Be still and know that I am God.”²⁹⁵ Youth Pastor, Greg Fuchs, who has journeyed with hundreds of young people through our Rocky Mountain Region Backcountry program, agrees that the wilderness is a unique setting where solitude forges character and perspective: “The trail helped me understand that my relationship with God will be more about the journey then the end result. What God is doing is more important then finishing!”²⁹⁶

For young people, wilderness experiences are often characterized by the most uninterrupted amount of time they may have ever experienced in solitude reading God’s word. As they spend time reading the Bible, they discover that many others (young and old) have been searching for God for millennia, and the Bible contains an account of their search.²⁹⁷ Thus a personal encounter with God through solitude and reading the Scriptures is highly common to outdoor experiences with young people.

Lastly, it was agreed at this 1996 symposium in Bradford Woods that a final quality of any authentic wilderness experience is that spending time in the wilderness forges a more *caring attitude* among those who tread its paths: “The wilderness visit can

²⁹⁴ Borrie and Roggenbuck:37.

²⁹⁵ Psalm 46:10.

²⁹⁶ Greg Fuchs, interview by Ashley Denton, April, 2004, email.

²⁹⁷ Stephen F. Venable and Donald M. Joy, *How to Use Camping Experiences in Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1998), 116.

induce profound changes in people's relationship to nature, and in their value system.”²⁹⁸

This has profound implications for leading young people into the outdoors for the purpose of spiritual transformation. As we begin to explore ways young people can engage the challenges of poverty, violence, differing religions, and the clashing of cultures and civilizations in our world today, a prerequisite for significant influence as a leader will require an attitude of care and love for those who are walking in darkness—those who are different from us, or maybe even violent toward us. This can be learned perhaps most poignantly in the natural outdoor setting of wilderness.

In addition to the elements mentioned above, many agree that the wilderness is an excellent environment for counseling young people with behavioral challenges through an experiential process. Patricia Doucette asks an important question at the outset of her study regarding the value of walking in the outdoors versus sitting in an office while counseling young people. She writes, “Do preadolescent and adolescent youths with behavioral challenges benefit from a multimodal intervention of walking outdoors while engaging in counseling?”²⁹⁹ Her study reveals that walking outdoors during counseling is beneficial to the process of behavioral transformation among at-risk youth.

Author and adolescent researcher, Rebecca Cowan discovered similar results in the lives of several participants she led in the wilderness. One camper described her experience in terms of how it increased her self esteem:

Lord,’ wrote one camper in his journal, ‘You know that I am struggling with a bad self-image. Lots of times Satan puts thoughts in my head about not being

²⁹⁸ Borrie and Roggenbuck, 37.

²⁹⁹ Patricia Doucette, "Walk and Talk: An Intervention for Behaviorally Challenged Youths." *Adolescence* 39, no. 154 (Summer 2004): HTML, http://web24.epnet.com/citation.asp?tb=1&_ug=fim+0+cp+1+dbs+reh%2Crfh%2Crlh/ (accessed 11/14/2005).

worth anything. But I know that is wrong. You especially designed and made me—just like You made this beautiful vast wilderness around me.³⁰⁰

Another camper wrote about his solo experience (which is a common component of many wilderness trips) where he slept alone for a night under the stars: “Being alone on the solo made me realize how much I really do need people and how much I take them for granted... I enjoy being with people and sharing my life with them and having them share their lives with me.”³⁰¹ And another participant wrote of his newly discovered understanding that the limitations he experienced in the wilderness taught him to depend on God:

The whole experience was fantastic! Through the entire trip I was learning how to relate to people and God, learning about myself, my limits, my possibilities, my helps. Most important of all was that I learned that God is interested in everything I do.³⁰²

Luckner and Nadler present an adventure-based learning process model in their book, *Processing the Experience*, which provides a good synopsis as to why adventure-based learning is effective:

³⁰⁰ Rebecca Cowan, "Stress Camping Experience." *Youthworker*, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 42.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 43.

³⁰² Ibid., 45.

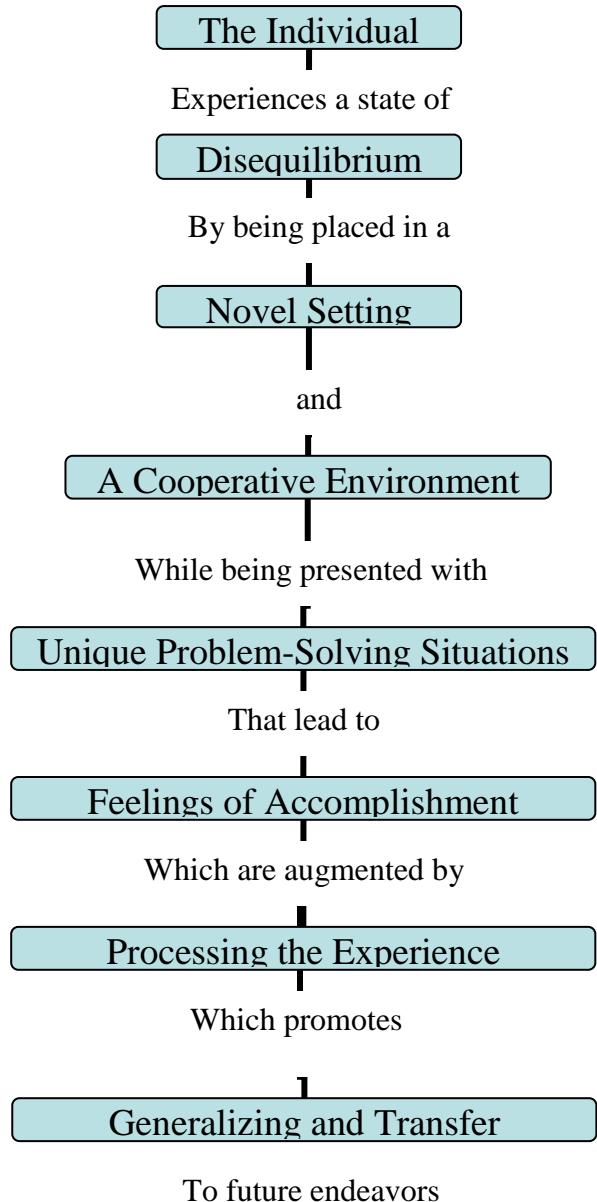


Figure 6: Adventure Based Learning Processing Model³⁰³

³⁰³ Luckner and Nadler, 258.

Learning Style Research

Learning style research continues to gain interest among educators. The premise of learning style research is that people have a different way of learning, thus good teachers need to learn how to adapt and communicate in ways that provide all learning types the ability to excel. In *Learning Styles; Reaching Everyone God Gave you to Teach*, Marlene LeFever describes the “4MAT System” developed by *Excel, Inc.*³⁰⁴ This system categorizes learners into four types. First there are *imaginative learners*. Their main question in the learning process is “Why do I need to know this?” A teacher or leaders’ role with this person’s learning style is to motivate the student by getting them excited about *what is coming next*. In other words, it is essential with this learning style to, 1. Create an experience, and then 2. Reflect upon that experience afterward.³⁰⁵

Another type of learner is the *analytic learner*. At the outset of any experience, her question will most likely be, “What do I need to know?”³⁰⁶ The outdoor leader’s role with this type of learning style is to *share with the participants what they need to know* in order to gain greater insight or the get the most out of the experience. In other words, the outdoor guide needs to find ways to teach synthetically, weaving rudimentary or historical knowledge about the subject along with specific skills which the learner will need to master, in order to experience the benefits of her new skill.

A third type of learner is the *sensing learner*. His greatest concern is, “How does what I’m learning effect my life today?” The instructor’s role with this learning style is

³⁰⁴ Marlene LeFever, *Learning Styles; Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach* (Colorado Springs: Church Ministry Resources, 2001), 218-219; Diagram on page 217.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 217.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

to be a *coach*,³⁰⁷ helping the participant think about how to apply the principles or skills³⁰⁸ they are learning into tactics or strategy for accomplishing some goal. In other words, the outdoor leader will be most helpful to these learners if he can articulate to the participant what their current situation is (the “givens”) and then *helping them to practice a skill*; increasing their potential towards mastery of a craft.

The last learning style LeFever mentions is that of *dynamic learning*. The person with this learning style will naturally wonder “What are the potential spin-offs or benefits of learning this skill or knowledge?” The teacher’s role with this style of learner is to serve as a *guide*, nudging them along and evaluating their progress. The Outdoor leader in this role can ask questions or share vision to enlarge ideas, to encourage, and to challenge. Self-discovery is the best way dynamic learners gain knowledge as they take what they’ve been taught and apply it creatively. The key to these learners being empowered is for them to understand the useful application of what they are learning and then to “do it”—in a hands-on way.³⁰⁹

LeFever’s research is interesting, yet the problem we find with this system (and the suggestions they offer to teachers in how to apply these principles), is that the setting for learning is still in a contrived environment (like a classroom) rather than in real life. In their model, the teacher is to “create an experience” in which the four types of learners will excel. Creating experiences in a classroom situation is difficult and usually contrived, lacking the potent impact of real-life situational teaching. It might be enjoyable and interesting in a classroom, but rarely life-changing. From our perspective

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

on outdoor leadership and experiential learning, the subtle difference is that the outdoor leader's role is to *initiate an experience together as a group in a real life setting, and then teach in the midst of the experience; evaluating what happened afterward.*

In terms of the cultural application of this concept of learning styles, Lingenfelter asserts that learning styles are not necessarily related to culture, but are more individual. Yet culture does have some influence on what is *rewarded*:

Relational or global learners see the whole first, then relates them to the whole. Some cultures value and reward global strategies: learning by watching, by memorizing whole texts, or by participating in an activity. Other culture value and reward verbal, analytical thinking, in which the learner asks exploratory questions or separates an object, a story, or an argument into its constituent parts.... Some people mistakenly assume that all non-western people are global learners and all westerners are analytical. That is not the case because a learning style is an individual circumstance, not a cultural one.³¹⁰

Jesus' approach to learning styles was a blend of relational, kinesthetic involvement, and analytical styles.³¹¹ The Lingenfelters cites Charles Kraft's research of Jesus' methods of communication to illustrate this point:

[Kraft] notes that Jesus used parables and stories to teach the crowds and train his disciples. Jesus also took his disciples with him, sharing every aspect of his life and ministry. They walked together, ate together, watched him teach, participated with him in his miracles, prayed together, and slept together in homes, along the road, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. After an extended period of watching, listening, and participating with him in ministry, Jesus sent them out in twos to practice the things they had seen him do.... A careful study of Jesus' practice shows a blend of relational and analytical techniques for teaching his disciples and the others who followed him. His method of choice was the parable, and his preferred teaching context was relational.³¹²

³¹⁰ Judith Lingenfelter, and Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally; An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, 61.

³¹¹ Ibid., 66: Table 5.1 shows learning styles and intelligences valued—it shows how bodily/kinesthetic experience is a valued intelligence of the relational learning style. Also notable is Table 5.2: "Suggestions for Effective Teaching Methods with Relational Sensitive African Students."

³¹² Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983); quoted in Judith and Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally; An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 66-67.

Jesus' model of blending styles to include all types of learning is a model that crosses cultures and will be effective as we develop further this vision for experiential wilderness ministry in Asia-Pacific. The preceding literature reviews have provided a Scriptural basis for the effectiveness of experiential learning. The next chapters will develop a theology of journey through the Old and New Testament so that a practical connection can be drawn between Jesus' teaching methods and a wilderness ministry model which we hope to design and implement internationally. Our hope is that young people will meet Jesus and grow in their faith through the renewing of an ancient teaching paradigm which more closely models the experiential aspect of Jesus' training methods. The challenges in the implementation phase will be to develop a plan to communicate and persuade leaders of young people to make outdoor ministry a part of their annual ministry plan. We believe in doing so, we will see transformation in youth subcultures throughout Asia-Pacific.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK PART I: JESUS CHRIST'S RHYTHM OF ENGAGEMENT AND RETREAT

Throughout history, God has used the *wilderness* as a special place for transformation. We will find in chapters four and five that the Scriptures indicate God's strategy for developing mission-focused leaders almost always involved transforming wilderness experiences. Today in our increasingly urbanized world we are less able to regularly retreat into the wilderness. In developing strategies for recruiting, training, sending and sustaining leaders to be equipped for cross cultural missions (able to effectively introduce the young to Jesus Christ), we must re-discover this ancient apprenticing method which produced leaders such as Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Jacob, David, Peter, James, John, and Paul. Each of them were profoundly called and shaped by the Lord in the wilderness.

To expect that we can develop the numbers of catalytic leaders that are needed for missions today without providing wilderness experiences as a part of the apprenticeship strategy ignores a historical and theological principle of leadership development clearly espoused throughout the Biblical text. We observe that most youth ministries and youth mission agencies have not adequately understood and likewise, not pursued these strategies. And it is our hope to provide a framework in this study to encourage new research and mission strategy development to help improve how we "make disciples" through guided wilderness experiences.

Why is it so important that we develop more leaders to reach the young today?

Bryant Myers reports in his article, *The State of the World's Children: Critical Challenge to Christian Mission*, of the 78% of the world's young people:

1.4 billion of the 1.8 billion—are growing up in non-Christian settings. This situation reflects two factors: 1) A substantial portion of the children in nominally Christian countries live in nonreligious families, and 2) over the last twenty years the growth rate of Muslim and nonreligious populations has outpaced the growth rate of the world population as a whole.³¹³

Also, since our world is becoming increasingly urban-centered, we assert that there must be a sharper focus to provide *more wilderness experiences* for young people today; so that through them, new visionary mission leaders will be identified, nurtured, and equipped to carry out the Great Commission.

Many are familiar with the metaphor of “wilderness” woven through salvation history recorded in the Bible. And many lessons are to be learned from this metaphor. We are concerned, however, that in the West we often find comfort in metaphors and discomfort in *reality*. We talk of personal “wilderness experiences” often. But how often in our growing urbanized world, have people actually *experienced* a true wilderness experience *in* the wilderness setting from which most of these metaphors are drawn in the Biblical account? In our thesis, to the best of our knowledge, we have reviewed every wilderness journey recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. The method employed was to evaluate each wilderness journey where the text explicitly identifies a life-change occurring as a result of the journey. Our analysis identified seventy-two such journeys in the Hebrew Scriptures, and thirty-eight in the New Testament.³¹⁴ The most

³¹³ Bryant L. Myers, *State of the World's Children: Critical Challenge to Christian Mission*, International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 18:3.

³¹⁴ Please see Appendix I for a list of all such journeys identified and analyzed.

instructive journeys have been chosen to develop the following principles in chapters four and five toward a theology of wilderness journey. A theological index was developed to analyze these passages. Fifty-two Old Testament and twenty-one New Testament accounts were closely analyzed resulting in the discovery of five guiding principles pertaining to a theology of wilderness journey. The following two chapters interact with each of these guiding principles.

A serendipitous discovery was made in the process of developing this theological grid. We found that the Great Commission account in the Gospel of Matthew provides a concise overview of *all five of the principles* categorized in our Biblical study toward a theology of wilderness journey. Thus these five unifying categories indicate that the wilderness as a special place for: 1) *Retreat*, reflection, perspective, strategy, and changing wrong views; “Then the eleven disciples *went* to Galilee, *to the mountain...* where Jesus had told them to go” (Matt. 28:16, italics added). 2) *Timing* and the *physical setting of the wilderness* are important aspects *God’s call upon individuals and groups*; “Then the eleven disciples *went...* *to the mountain....*”³¹⁵ 3) The wilderness is also a special place for *testing* and establishing character; “When they saw him, they worshiped him; *but some doubted*” (Matt. 28:17, italics added). 4) Establishing Jesus’ *identity* and His people’s identity; “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*’ (Matt. 28:18 italics added). 5) *Leadership training*; “Therefore *go and make disciples* of all nations.... And surely *I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”³¹⁶ Thus Matthew 28:16-20 will be a unifying passage for our

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Matthew 18: 19-20.

thesis in which we assert that *the wilderness is a special place God uses to choose and transform His followers.*

In developing this study, we have been heavily influenced philosophically by Robert Coleman's *Master Plan of Evangelism* and *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism*, as well as Walter Brueggemann's *The Message of the Psalms*. These works have been a source of influence in developing a theology of wilderness *journey*. Robert Coleman brings to life Jesus' strategy of choosing and training His disciples, and Walter Brueggemann draws out of the Psalms a pattern of *orientation, disorientation, and new orientation*: He identifies a rhythm in the life of the psalmist, and shows how the Biblical data supports a view that this rhythm is experienced by all those whom God chooses as followers... it is a *journey* of growth to maturity.

We will expand our understanding of this rhythm as the study continues, but a brief overview of the rhythm found in the Psalms will be mentioned. We find in the life of David times when it seemed nothing could shake him. He believed in God and prayed with confidence; his soul was lifted in praise. Psalm 30 is a psalm which illustrates each of these three orientations. First, he prays from a position of *orientation*: "Now as for me, I said in my prosperity, 'I will never be moved.' O LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong..." (Psalm 30:6-7). Yet following this season of orientation, he cried out to the Lord in a time of *disorientation*:

O LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong; You hid Your face, I was dismayed. To You, O LORD, I called, And to the Lord I made supplication: 'What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness? 'Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me; O LORD, be my helper.' (Psalm 30:7-10)

And lastly we see how David has walked through a season of disorientation and once again risen to a point of *new orientation* toward God: "You have turned for me my

mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, That my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever" (Psalm 30:11-12).

Our thesis will build on the principles of evangelism and discipleship which Coleman and Brueggemann have already developed in great detail. We will focus specifically on a theological understanding of how God often apprentices his leaders in the context of wilderness journeys.³¹⁷ In addition to the influence of the Scriptures and authors like Coleman and Brueggemann, our personal experiences in the wilderness with young people have provided some insight. We have observed through many years of youth ministry that one of the most effective strategies available to employ *incarnational* principles of evangelism and discipleship is through brief shared experiences with young people in the wilderness; these carefully crafted and guided outdoor adventures are carried out effectively because they model the experiential nature in which Jesus taught and apprenticed His disciples.

In the past fifteen years the author has spent nearly 300 days and nights in the wilderness with groups of young people. This study seeks to provide a theological framework to understand what we have been doing successfully over the years so that we will be able to further influence effective and fruitful youth mission work throughout the world. Our hope is that every young person would have an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ and grow in his or her faith through a guided wilderness adventure. And that

³¹⁷ Jesus' principles of teaching and training were almost always experiential in nature, and quite often, as we will find in this study, He chose the wilderness or desert setting to train his Disciples. We are not saying that He only taught principles of discipleship in the wilderness; we know that He often instructed in the context of urban situations as well. But we are asserting that He Himself was shaped in His relationship with the Father through solitude in the wilderness and that the most common setting for teaching and training the Twelve was in outdoor settings. The Old Testament record also indicates a preference for wilderness or desert wanderings and experiences as a method of training and developing His chosen people, Israel.

through these wilderness journeys, hundreds of leaders will be identified, equipped, and commissioned to local (“near-neighbor”) and cross-cultural youth mission fields of the world.

When we look at Jesus’ apprenticing methods we find that His focus was on journeying with a small band of followers. We also find that a *majority of his apprenticing took place in the wilderness*. Today, the majority of leader apprenticeship does not take place *in* the wilderness or outdoors. Our hope is to provide data illustrating that the way Jesus prepared leaders *for the city* was through apprenticing them *primarily in natural outdoor settings* rather than classrooms. Why did Jesus choose these special desolate places to teach and train His disciples? To put it simply, He employed this strategy because *the wilderness is a special place for transformation*. We know this from experience, and our study will support this view theologically.

We know that Jesus was well-acquainted with the Hebrew Scriptures, thus He was familiar with Yaweh’s transformation of Israel through wilderness journeys; this provided Jesus with a model for His ministry. As we look at the overwhelming data in the Hebrew Scriptures related to wilderness journeys, we observe how Jesus’ methods of experiential apprenticeship (primarily in the outdoors) were informed and influenced by His understanding of how the Heavenly Father involved His chosen people in wilderness journeys as an aspect of His apprentice strategy.

One further cultural observation related to the study is necessary at this point. As we have noted earlier in our thesis, in the West today, there is a tendency to focus more on the “wilderness” metaphor rather than taking the Biblical accounts literally and grappling with the reality that much of this life-change among God’s people happened *in* the wilderness—not in a metaphorical sense but in the *literal* setting of the wilderness.

Western Christians have a tendency to water down other timeless principles into passive metaphorical/cognitive ideologies. This passive inclination is one of the ways syncretism happens in a culture. For instance, often when passages on “the talents”, or “the rich fool” are taught, Westerners immediately relate the application of the parable, (which teaches that unless we are rich toward God we are utterly foolish) (Luke 12:21)³¹⁸ to how we “invest” our *time, energy*, etc. We often skirt around the fact that Jesus clearly was teaching His hearers about the spirituality of *money, not our use of time or energy*.

It is our conviction that we do the same in terms of the “wilderness” *metaphor*. It is common to hear sermons on how every person goes through personal “wilderness” experiences of difficulty, despair and trial, in order to develop perseverance. We do not have a quarrel with this as *one* application of the wilderness passages; in the Apostle Paul and James use this metaphor. But it is not the *only* application. We assert that there has not been given enough attention to the overwhelming data in the whole of Scripture which points to the principle that the wilderness is a special *place* for transformation. Wilderness is more than a metaphor, it is a place we are to actually go—experiencing fresh air, the sounds of streams, birds, thunder storms, physical challenges, sleeping under the stars, living in community, learning to pack light, climbing peaks, paddling through storms, journeying through desert canyons.

When we look at the Biblical data, we find that it is *in* the wilderness where much transformation happens. We live in an increasingly urbanized world where three fifths of the world’s population will live in sprawling urban landscapes by the year 2030: people’s daily experiences usually do not include any time alone, out of the city in the

³¹⁸ Luke 12:21 reads "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself

natural creation, or with others for the purpose of encountering God.³¹⁹ Yet, as we look at how Jesus chose to spend His time by Himself with the Father and with His band of disciples, we see that He chose a small group of followers and modeled for them *a rhythm of engagement and retreat* into the wilderness. *His pattern was one of engaging the masses* (in the cities), and then *retreating into the wilderness* either alone or with His disciples for rest, renewal, training, and strategizing through silence, solitude, and prayer. Essentially, He modeled how to be a marathon runner in ministry.

New Zealand, where we have worked among young people for the past two years, provides a case study for this problem of developing “marathon” youth workers: The crisis in New Zealand, as with other Western peoples, is that the average tenure of a paid youth worker is only nine months. And in the third and two-thirds world there are few vocational youth workers at all. If we are going to make an impact on the next generation of young people, we must model a *rhythm of engagement and retreat* in order to multiply marathon-type leaders (vocational and volunteer youth leaders) who will be able to carry out the Great Commission among the young of the world season after season, year after year.

If we believe that the wilderness experiences in the text are only meant to be metaphorically applied, then we are missing what Jesus modeled. He took His disciples into the fresh air, on pebbled paths; He sat under trees, slept under the stars, and walked along the beach with His disciples. This was the habit of His ministry. His apprenticesing methods were primarily *experiential* in nature. *What we see in the training methods of church today is an overemphasis on engaging the imagination—focusing on rhetoric,*

largely disregarding the experiential apprenticeship methods which Jesus employed. Yet what we see in the life of Christ is dusty feet, tired bones, and sweaty brows. He apprenticed His disciples and taught them Kingdom truths in the midst of the physical environment. He hardly needed to engage their imaginations at all because His audience was sitting in the “set” of the parable; all He had to do was point out the scene.

Yes, learning from the wilderness metaphor *teaches* us something, but journeying through the wilderness *makes* us something.³²⁰ God is interested more in making and remaking, sanctifying and growing young men and women. This is the pattern we find in God walking with His people.

Definition of “Wilderness”

At this point it is necessary to provide parameters for the term “wilderness.” We will define wilderness primarily in terms of proximity and distance to civilization: The wilderness is any place where the natural creation dominates the landscape, thus distant enough from civilization where one’s senses ascertain he or she is more influenced by the forces of nature rather than by the comforts of civilization. For practical purposes, we will use three standards to describe *where* wilderness might be; all of which, to the best of our knowledge parallel the Biblical definition of *wilderness*. 1) Biblical references to wilderness refer to desert or desolate lands uninhabited by man, 2) the standards of the Wilderness Medicine Institute specify that if a person is more than one hour from medical help, this is considered “wilderness”, thus the person administering first aid has other priorities to consider in providing treatment, especially in the realm of exposure over time

³¹⁹ Greenway and Monsma, 13.

and within the elements of weather.³²¹ 3) The standards of the United States Wilderness Act of 1964, authored by Howard Zahniser, describe *wilderness* in terms of pristine landscapes; “untrammelled by man.”³²²

The Wilderness Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1964 and continues to be the guiding piece of legislation in the United States for all Wilderness areas. It is also referred to by many other developed countries as a helpful guide. The Act defines Wilderness as follows:

...lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition...
 Section 2(a)
 ...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man...
 Section 2(c)
 ...an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvement or human habitation... Section 2(c)
 ...generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable... Section 2(c)
 ...has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation... Section 2(c)
 ...shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreation, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historic use. Section 4(b)³²³

In other words, the wilderness is a place where one’s senses indicate he is surrounded by the pristine natural world, i.e. the sounds, smells, and view, tell him he is *surrounded by the God-made rather than the man-made*.

³²⁰ Oswald Chambers et al., *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), October 1.

³²¹ Buck Tilton, "Wilderness First Aid," in *Wilderness Medicine Institute FAQ's*, ed, Active website <http://www.wmi.net.au/wmi/FAQ/Default.asp/> (accessed July 27, 2004): "When you are more than one hour away from definitive medical care you are in a Wilderness Medicine situation. Wilderness Medicine is characterized by extended patient care time, extremes of environment and the need to improvise resources."

³²² Howard Zahniser, "Wilderness Act," in ed, Active website <http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=whatIsWilderness#act/> (accessed June 1, 2005).

³²³ Ibid.

Robert Funk, in his article *The Wilderness* has provided careful research to provide a Biblical/geographical definition of the term “wilderness” at it appears throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament. He writes:

...on the basis of annual rainfall... the lower half of the Rift Valley merits the description desert. This desert-dry area, moreover, covers the lower half of the valley in the shape of an inverted-U, climbing the slope on the west until it rises nearly to Jerusalem; it embraces the whole of south Judah and east of the central ridge.... Apart from a few settlements supported by elaborate water systems and military outposts, there has never been extensive occupation in the wilderness of Judah. It is significant to note that this area is still dominated by Bedouin today.³²⁴

He goes on to explain that the “wilderness” in the New Testament refers to the wilderness of Sinai or the wilderness of Judea (not just Judah), including the lower Jordan valley and possibly the eastern slopes of the valley.³²⁵ This description is important for our thesis in that we must understand the “wilderness”, as it is mentioned in the Old and New Testament, as a specific *place* not a metaphorical allusion. Scripturally, the term *wilderness* is most often used to describe a specific place rather being used as a generic term. However Funk asserts that “wilderness” is used in the Bible as a metaphor, yet that is only one application:

It should be stressed at the outset that ‘the wilderness’ often bears a non-local, mythical sense in primitive Near Eastern mythologies and that this meaning is carried over in part into Biblical thought. In the latter it is also developed as a theological phrase with reference to Israel’s original encounter with a rebellion against Yahweh. It is not, however, a question of either/or....the question... therefore, is whether this topographical-mythical-theological phrase was localized in proximity to the holy land and the holy mountain, Zion.³²⁶

³²⁴ Robert W. Funk, "The Wilderness." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, no. 3 (September 1959): 209.

³²⁵ Ibid., 214.

³²⁶ Ibid., 205-206.

He continues:

The wilderness, insofar as it is localized in Palestine, nearly always refers to this area or some portion thereof in the OT. I find little evidence for the view that the wilderness is a generic term denoting uninhabited land as such in contrast with inhabited areas.³²⁷

From a more global perspective, McCloskey and Spalding provide a helpful understanding of the way “wilderness” is understood cross culturally:

The term ‘wilderness’ is used primarily in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Elsewhere, the term ‘wildland’ may be used more commonly for the kind of land identified in this inventory, but there are no accepted definitions of that term. In some places, wildland includes land with low-standard roads and limited levels of resource exploitation.³²⁸

They also provide further insight regarding the intrinsic value of wilderness, i.e. why it is important in environmental terms, as well as a description of how the international community describes its concern and affinity for wild places:

The term ‘wilderness’ in contrast enjoys a settled definition in the places where it is used and a growing body of literature elaborating on its values. Its values fall largely in to four broad categories: (i) biological: as a gene pool and benchmark against which to measure change; (ii) geophysical: to buffer climactic change and to enhance watershed function; (iii) recreational: as a place of refreshment, adventure, and rediscovery; and (iv) moral: as a place where other forces and creatures can seek their destiny free of human domination; and in some cases, it is the homeland for truly indigenous peoples.³²⁹

Jesus Christ’s Rhythm of Engagement and Retreat

Jesus of Nazareth’s rhythm of ministry typically involved engaging the masses and retreating into the wilderness with a small band of followers for the purpose of transformation.³³⁰ He retreated to reflect and remember; to gain perspective, to form

³²⁷ Ibid., 209.

³²⁸ McCloskey and Spalding, 222.

³²⁹ Ibid., 222.

³³⁰ The modern terminology for this lifestyle of transformation would be *spiritual formation*.

strategy.³³¹ He often retreated with His disciples in order to change their wrong views of God or wrong views of others. He clearly modeled this rhythm for His disciples to carry on after He was gone, and for good reason: This rhythm was sustainable and promoted health and longevity in His followers. Jesus knew how to be a marathon runner—the pace in which He trained His disciples to “run” was sustainable. And Jesus’ rhythm of labor and retreat models a vital principle for us today, that the right *starting place* for ministry is *rest*.

God Demands and Enables a Different Way of Life

Jesus modeled a lifestyle and ministry of engagement and retreat; He engaged the masses as a shepherd gathering lost sheep then retreated for rest and renewal. We also see this pattern in the Old Testament as God apprenticed His people to *be a people of rest*. In Exodus 16:22-36: the Lord provides extra manna for Sabbath observance to teach His people to rest. In this account, God tested the people in the wilderness to establish them in obedience to Sabbath rest: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction’” (Exodus 16:4). Moses taught the people in the wilderness that the Sabbath was a special day: “Moses said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. ‘Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, *the Sabbath*, there will be none’” (Exodus 16:25-26). Yet some people went out to gather on the seventh day, against the Lord’s command. We discover how serious the Lord is about our being

³³¹ These categories are unfolded Biblically throughout the study.

a people of rest and retreat in His response to their disobedience; and we find that His rebuke accomplished *transformation* in the people for a period of time:

Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? ‘See, the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day. (Exodus 16:28-29)

Nahum Sarnah comments:

Not all the people were enjoying the Sabbath. Some were out hunting for manna. Once again, the theme of God testing the obedience of the people recurs. ‘How long will you refuse to keep my commandments?’ God gives them a double portion of bread, but *he demands a different way of life* (italics mine).³³²

Retreat as Preparation for Spiritual Conflict and Strategizing

In the New Testament we see a pattern of engagement and retreat throughout the life of Jesus, where He treasured time alone with the Heavenly Father in prayer. Jesus retreated to the wilderness often for blessing and preparation for conflict. Luke the Evangelist shows how the *wilderness is a place of preparation for conflict with Satan* (Luke 4:1-13.). The Gospel of Mark shows Jesus’ rhythm of retreat before He healed the multitudes by the sea (Mark 3:7-12), and when the Apostles returned to Him in need of rest after their first evangelistic mission (Mark 6:30-31). Mark also shows how Jesus often went away to receive guidance from His Father through prayer. The wilderness was a special place where Jesus prayerfully *formed His strategy in mission*. From Mark’s account we learn that although doors for ministry were wide open in a certain region, through a time of retreat where He listened to His Father in prayer, Jesus chose to go to

³³² Nahum Sarnah, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, ed. Nahum Sarnah (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 290-91.

other towns and villages. We need time away to pray and listen so that our strategy is formed in the *spiritual realm* rather than in the realm in which we can only *see*:

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left *the house*, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him, and said to Him, “Everyone is looking for You.” He said to them, “Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for. (Mark 1:35-38)

Limitation

Now we will explore several sub-principles related to Jesus’ rhythm of engagement and rest throughout the Bible. Early in Biblical history, God used the wilderness as a special place to teach His people that *limitations and personal boundaries are good and necessary because of pride and sin*. Through rest and retreat we learn to respect the limitations we have in our humanness. God is serious about His people embracing limitation rather than trying to be like God who has *no* limits. We see the consequence of man trying to live without limits and his abuses of power and pride early in the city of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). With one universal language, the potential for disaster was inevitable because of man’s hunger for power and propensity toward pride. So God instituted the limitation of language (many languages instead of a universal one) upon humanity and then dispersed them into the wilderness to protect them from the power of their sinful nature. Nahum Sarnah notes:

Humankind has abused the benefactions of kinship and ready communication for unworthy, vainglorious ends in defiance of God’s will that the entire earth be populated. Unless preventative measures are taken, there will be no limit to man’s arrogant schemes.³³³

³³³ Sarnah, 84.

Again, in the wilderness at Sinai, God in His love and mercy instituted good and necessary limitations for Israel through His servant Moses. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) teach us to rejoice in limitations instituted within community for *protection and freedom* as we live in a sinful world. The Psalmist declares, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law (Psalm 119:18). We find this principle of limitation is clearly learned in the context of wilderness experiences. As young people experience physical limitation and fatigue they often are more able to understand their dependence on God and thus are more receptive to His grace. Robert Coleman agrees: “Times of human weakness afford opportunity for learning deeper spiritual truths. Usually people in physical distress are more aware of their own limitations, and hence have greater receptivity to divine grace.”³³⁴

Wilderness experiences naturally teach us about limitations and boundaries. One can only carry so much weight on his back, he can only paddle so long each day, and one can only live without food and water for limited time. One should respect the boundary of a cliff’s edge if he is standing on a peak with 80 mph winds at his back, and one should probably remain at camp on the beach and adjust his plans if the waves are too intense to navigate in a sea kayak, etc. Thus the wilderness is an ideal place for young people to grasp the goodness of God’s loving-boundaries and limitations. For example, one camper shared his reflections on what he learned about the principle of limitations: “The whole experience was fantastic! Through the entire trip I was learning how to relate to people and God, learning about myself, my limits, my possibilities....”³³⁵

³³⁴ Coleman, *The Master’s Way of Personal Evangelism*, 79-80. See also Mark 2:1-12, Matthew 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26.

³³⁵ Cowan, 45.

Remembrance

Another principle of retreat which Jesus modeled for His disciples was that of remembrance. We need to be reminded of timeless truths often, and the wilderness was a favorite place for Jesus to forge remembrance. Remembrance is also a common theme throughout Hebrew history, thus we can assert the wilderness is historically *a special place of reminding*.

In Genesis 15:1-21 the LORD made a covenant with Abraham and reminded him of His blessing (Genesis 15:5). Another significant moment in Israel's history came after Moses appointed Joshua to succeed him in leadership. After miraculously passing through the Jordan River on dry land, God instructed Joshua to set up a memorial of stones at the edge of the Jordan River to remind the generations of the Lord's faithfulness; that He had provided safe passage into the Promised Land (Joshua 4:6-7). It was also at this memorial ceremony by the Jordan River that God reminded Israel of *Missio Dei* (His mission to reach all the people of the world through Israel):

For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever. (Joshua 4:23-24)³³⁶

Yes, the wilderness is a *special place* where *Missio Dei* is remembered!

In the most exhaustive Old Testament restatement of Israel's historic wilderness wanderings, Joshua models this principle of *remembrance* by reminding Israel of the lessons they learned through their wilderness journeys (Joshua 24:1-28). He outlines Abraham's journey to Canaan, Jacob and Esau's journey to Egypt, and Moses' mission to

³³⁶ The scene and content of Joshua's sermon announcing *Missio Dei* has similarities to Abraham's commission to bring good news to the nations in Genesis 12:3ff.

lead the Hebrews out of Egypt even as they were pursued by Pharaoh's chariots to the Red Sea. Through the Red Sea they journeyed in the wilderness—crossing the Jordan, where the Lord gave Jericho into their hands, driving many peoples out of the land before them. After Joshua's remembrance speech in the wilderness, the people gave glory to God saying, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice" (Joshua 24:25). After *reminding* Israel of God's faithfulness to them, Joshua dismissed each family—each to his inheritance.

Later in the New Testament, John the Baptist stands out as the prophet preparing the way of the Lord in the wilderness by calling the people to *remember* God's holiness and man's sinfulness (Matthew 3:1-6). The message of repentance he preached in the wilderness forged memory because his preaching stood out similarly to the prophets of antiquity, and in contrast to the other wandering prophets of his day.³³⁷ He stood out because he preached a message of *transformation, and the place* from which he preached also contrasted the routines and comforts people experienced in their normal urban lives. As people traveled out of the cities to hear him preach and receive the baptism of repentance in the Jordan River; his message was likely to stand out from the false prophets of the day because he called for *repentance and heart transformation*, and because he shouted his rebuke from the wilderness rather than from the comforts of the city. His message was different. He was different. And the wilderness-place from which he taught would have *reminded* people of their obstinate forefathers' journey through the

³³⁷ John the Baptist's father, Zacharias prophesied that John would prepare Israel to receive Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of sins, "To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77). This prophecy is a quote of the prophet Jeremiah who said, "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, *for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more* (Jeremiah 31:34)." (italics mine)

wilderness. He shouted: “And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matthew 3:9).

The book of *Hebrews* will be treated extensively later in our thesis referring to a *remembrance* of Israel’s wilderness wanderings and the theme of God’s belief-testing of His people in the wilderness. Yet a brief look at the first six chapters of *Hebrews* establishes the following principle: *Man’s continuance in following Christ is the test of reality*. Speaking of Israel’s hardened forefathers during the time of the wilderness wanderings, the writer says, “For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (Hebrews 4:2). Many times Israel began well, but did not finish well. The writer of Hebrews’ commentary on Joshua’s journey is especially important.

F.F. Bruce notes:

...the reader of the Greek Bible had (and still has) an advantage over the reader of the English Bible because to him “Joshua” and “Jesus” are not two names but one; he could distinguish between our Lord and his most illustrious namesake of Old Testament days, and at the same time appreciate some of the implications of the fact that they *are* namesakes. The parallel between the Old Testament “Jesus,” who led his followers into the earthly Canaan, and Jesus the Son of God, who leads the heirs of the new covenant into their heavenly inheritance, is a prominent theme of early Christian typology.³³⁸

Interestingly, the Festival of Booths (*Hagha-Sukkot*) is a celebration to remember Israel’s dependence on God as they traveled through the wilderness for forty years living in relatively meager tents. Josiah Derby provides a helpful study on the Festival of

³³⁸ F.F Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Edited by Gordon D. Fee, The Epistle to the Hebrews; Revised*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, 108-109.

Booths which supports our assertion of the significance of the memory-forging benefit of wilderness experiences. He writes:

The rationale for building a sukkah and living in it during the seven days of Hag ha-Sukkot (Festival of Booths or Tabernacles) is set forth in Leviticus 23:43: 'In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people to live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt....' The question comes to mind: What is so remarkable or significant about the manner in which the Israelites were housed during their 40 –year sojourn in the wilderness that it is necessary to hold a special observance every year, generation after generation, as a reminder? Moreover, why must it be celebrated for seven days, beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishri); that is, at the end of summer (Lev. 23:33)? Furthermore, why does the text say [I caused to dwell] rather than simply [they dwelt]?³³⁹

He continues with a description of their tents and travel garments, and their theological significance:

The sukkah, it is argued, is a fragile hut and could not have given the Israelites much protection in the wilderness were it not for the presence of God in their midst, the real source of their protection. Hence, the sukkah is a reminder of our complete dependence upon God, since life is so fragile.The Torah is telling us that the entire sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness was a miraculous one, under the care of the Almighty. And this phenomenon is worth remembering and celebrating with a religious festival. Since we cannot replicate the manna, nor the well-preserved garments (footnote that Deut. 8:3-4) tells us that the Israelites clothing did not rot and their feet did not blister) of the wilderness, we built the sukkah as a symbol of that miraculous survival.³⁴⁰

When we lead groups of young people in the wilderness, we typically live in tents for several days, and sometimes a whole week. We may suggest that there are practical and theological reasons for doing this as it can be a form of remembrance of our dependence on God in every way. It is significant for the Jews that the Festival of Booths is annual and lasts for a *week*. One would not have the same experience at a *Hagha-Sukkot* festival if he was sleeping in the comforts of his home. And the same is true for

³³⁹ Josiah Derby, "The Wilderness Experience." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1998): 194.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 194, 196.

young people enjoying the wilderness. There is something special about having extended time in make-shift accommodations which forges trust in God. One can imagine the benefit of an *annual* week-long wilderness trip with groups of young people; living in tents remembering their dependence on God, remembering the faithfulness of God throughout history and in their lives at home in the city.

Remembering-Principles of God's Word

In regard to our theme of remembrance, the writer of Hebrews teaches us another principle of God's Word: *God's Word is not like man's word, it has the power to lead us to His eternal rest.* In the wilderness, the Israelites learned that when God speaks, He does not change what He says. Joshua urged Israel to *remember* that by God's Word the Red Sea and the Jordan River were parted; and in the same way the writer of Hebrews exhorted Jewish believers that God's Word had the power to pierce, divide, and transform man's heart:

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.
(Hebrews 4:11-13)

Two other Old Testament passages assert the importance of *remembering* that God's Word does not change: 1) Numbers 23:19 says "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good." 2) And Samuel reminds us: "The Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind" (1 Samuel 15:29). Our advantage today is that through the incarnation, Jesus

Christ has lived and breathed among the world, so we can be assured that not only does God remain the same yesterday, today, and forever (transcendence), but He also has vital presence and personality as well (immanence)—*we can know Him personally through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!*

The writer of the book of Genesis punctuates this principle that we can know Him personally with a balanced view of God's transcendence and immanence: “The LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them’” (Genesis 6:7). Thus He is immanent in that He is a God of personality and feeling. Yet by contrast, the wilderness was often a place where God's people were reminded of His separateness from mankind (transcendence). Often on wilderness trips, our participation in the community helps us understand God's closeness as members of the journey work together, serve one another, and exercise their gifts and talents for the benefit of the whole group. And the power observed in the forces of the natural world in which God has created is helpful for remembering His transcendence.

As we consider how to apply this principle of remembrance, we submit that in the wilderness through regular time of reflection and journaling we are often reminded of what *God has spoken to us personally* in the recent and distant past. The practice of regular quiet times along the journey creates space for young people to think and remember ways that they have seen God work or heard Him speak to them in the past. His Word is living and active, shaping us like clay in the Potter's hand.

Three other passages give us further understanding that the *wilderness is a special place where God speaks to us*. In speaking of Moses' life-changing experiences in the wilderness with God on Mount Sinai, Stephen preaches of the *living* character of God's

Word: “This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you” (Acts 7:38). The Apostle Peter asserts: “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). And the prophet Isaiah preaches: “So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11)

We are thus reminded that if He has spoken to us, His Word has not changed. Because our flesh is weak, we can often become deceived by our feelings so we easily change our minds or forget what God has spoken. In the wilderness we can consider anew, “Has God spoken clearly to me on this issue with which I am struggling? Have I over time fallen into unbelief even though God has already spoken to me on this issue?” We need regular wilderness experiences to *remind* us of what God has spoken: “Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience” (Hebrews 4:11).

Remembering to First Enter God’s Rest: Discerning His Appointed Work

We learn another important principle from our reflection on the theme of remembrance from the book of Hebrews. The wilderness teaches us that *we must first enter God’s rest in order to enter into God’s appointed work*: “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His” (Hebrews 4:9-10). In other words, anyone who enters God’s rest rests from his own work as God rested on the seventh day of

Creation. By obediently stopping to rest in God before enter into his work, a man has completed his appointed work according to God's will, i.e. he has *entered eternal rest*.

Hudson Taylor was very honest about his struggle to rest in this *belief*, and often prayed for faith but felt like it didn't come as he needed. A line from a letter from one of his dear friends, McCarthy, *reminded* him of this principle and gave him hope: "But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One."³⁴¹ So what is the difference between striving for faith and resting on the Faithful One? Watchman Nee, a Chinese pastor martyred in 1972, said, "Adam began his life with the Sabbath; for God works before he rests, while man must first enter into God's rest, and then alone can he work."³⁴² Again, Nee writes, "The secret of deliverance from sin is not to do something but to rest on what God has done."³⁴³ Jesus taught his disciples this lesson through modeling a rhythm of retreat into the wilderness for rest.

³⁴¹ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* (Chicago: The Muddy Bible Institute of Chicago, 1989), 160.

³⁴² Watchman Nee, *Sit, Walk, Stand* (Bombay: Gospel Literature Service, 1957), 16.

³⁴³ Ibid.,22.

Establishing Our Relationship to God and Against Satan

The next principle regarding this rhythm of engagement and retreat is that the wilderness is a special place where our relationship with God (a relationship of rest) and our relationship with Satan (a relationship of conflict) are established. One of the most instructive Old Testament accounts illustrating this principle is Elijah's encounter with God in the cave recorded in 1 Kings 19:1-21. Leading to this encounter with God, Elijah had an amazing power encounter between the prophets of Baal. Elijah called upon God, and "The fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench" (1 Kings 18:38). Then Elijah had every prophet of Baal slaughtered. Upon hearing of this news, Ahab, the King of Israel, told his wife Jezebel what Elijah had done. In her rage she sent Elijah this message: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them" (1 Kings 19:2). Naturally, Elijah became fearful and ran for his wife. Strengthened by a meal from the Angel of the Lord, "He traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night" (1 Kings 19:8-9). The next day the word of the LORD came to him:

What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but the LORD was* not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, *but the LORD was* not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, *but the LORD was* not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. When Elijah heard *it*, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your

way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram. (1 Kings 19:9b-15)

Preceding this encounter with God, Elijah had fasted forty days and nights. He *was tired and hungry*. We see through this encounter that God was preparing him in the wilderness for further prophetic ministry. He could have given him a holiday on a Mediterranean beach to give him rest and prepare him for the road ahead. But that isn't the way God usually prepares us for conflict. Instead this retreat is one of hunger and fatigue, culminating in a frightful encounter with the Living God. In this encounter Elijah is blessed and prepared for the work ahead.

We learn from this account that our relationship with God is one of *rest*, and our relationship with Satan is one of *conflict*.³⁴⁴ And the wilderness is a special place where both relationships are established. After this peak experience on the mountain, Elijah is sent back down into the valley with a new mission to anoint Hazael king over Aram, Jehu king over Israel, and to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet. Immediately after descending the mountain, the spiritual realm heaved with conflict in the days ahead after anointing Hazael and Jehu.³⁴⁵ Elijah's cave account has very similar parallels to Jesus' temptation in the desert in preparation for His ministry. The climax or peak of Elijah's encounter was meeting God in a "gentle whisper." Similarly, Jesus was blessed in the desert like Elijah, at His baptism; and His blessing *preceded* much conflict. This is why we also, as Jesus' disciples today must constantly abide in Him for the blessing we need to set out and remain steadfast in our relationship of conflict with Satan.

³⁴⁴ Mark 3:13ff illustrates Jesus preparing His Disciples for this relationship of conflict with Satan: "He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and *to have authority to drive out demons* (italics added)."

The temptation of Jesus Christ in the desert, recorded in Luke 4:1-3 indicates similarly *that the wilderness is a place of establishing our relationship with God and our relationship in conflict with Satan*. Immediately following His baptism and blessing, Jesus entered into conflict with Satan in the desert (Matthew 3:13-17). The wilderness is a unique place where relationships are established. In fact man's relationship with God was first established in the wilderness. Genesis 1-3 records God establishing man's relationship with Him; in the Garden of Eden we see man in perfect relationship under the blessing and authority of God. Then in Genesis four we see the Fall of Adam of Eve resulting in *conflict in all his relationships*; Adam and Eve now found themselves in conflict with God, with Satan, and with each other. This is the ultimate picture of loneliness as a result of rebellion.

From Genesis four onward, we see God unfolding His mission plan to restore relationships to their proper design: Man is meant to relate to God under His authority and blessing, he is meant to relate to Satan in conflict as God relates to him in conflict, and man is meant to relate to fellow mankind in community and interdependence. Both Elijah's and Jesus' wilderness experiences were ordained by God to further establish these men under His authority and blessing *so that* they would be able and willing to engage in the conflicts ahead with Satan for God's glory and purpose.

Jesus does not seem to tarry in establishing His disciple's relationship with Himself and their relationship in conflict with Satan. Very soon after calling His first disciples, Jesus sent the Seventy-Two on a mission to preach the good news to every town and village where He was intending to go. Before sending them He *prepared this*

³⁴⁵ 1 Kings 19:17-18ff: "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 'Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all

band of followers to encounter conflict because they were now identified by His name in the spiritual realm. Thus conflict was inevitable:

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. ‘Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ‘Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. (Luke 10:1-4)

When the Seventy-Two returned, they rejoiced because many demons had submitted to Jesus Christ’s name as they preached. Jesus spoke apocalyptically about the effect of their preaching within the spiritual realm saying: “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you” (Matthew 10:18-19).

It is an awesome experience to see lightning fall within just a few hundred feet in the wilderness. We’ve witnessed this on more than one occasion. The image of Satan falling like lightning is an earth-shattering analogy. Lighting crashes on the earth, it does not descend like a feather. The nature of our conflict with Satan is one of decisive battle; it is nothing less than full scale war. Jesus knew this. The call on His disciple’s lives was not a game, not an add-on to their daily lives; it was a wholesale call on their life. Jesus, being the Good Shepherd, prepares, protects, and fights for His flock. And He empowered His disciples to shepherd others in the same way.

Jesus also warned the Seventy-Two about the dangers of complacency. We see Jesus continually testing and training His disciples to protect them from laziness. He constantly redirects their attention to Himself and their relationship with Him rather than

their own sufficiency or power: “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

In the Wilderness our View of God, Self and Others is Changed

In addition to establishing the disciple’s relationship with Himself, against Satan, and with other men; *through retreat into the wilderness God often changes His follower’s view of Himself, them selves, and others.* Three texts are particularly instructive in regard to this principle. First, In the Gospel of Luke we are given a clear record of those who first heard the news of the new born king, Jesus Christ. The Shepherds who were tending their sheep *in the desert* were the first worshippers introduced and invited to come adore the infant Jesus. In this account we see Luke engaging his audience to help them understand the shepherd’s changed view of God. This *ruler* Jesus who was the expected Messiah was not the warrior king which much of Israel was awaiting, rather He was a *humble King* born in a manger. Luke also uses this account to communicate a *new view that the shepherds were to have of them selves.* The shepherds were the first to hear the good news—the humble and marginalized were invited to see the Son of God first. What a message of good news to the poor on the fringes of society.³⁴⁶

The second passage illustrating how Jesus changed wrong views of God, self and others in the wilderness is Luke 5:1-11. In this account Jesus takes Peter and his workmen out on the sea for the purpose of calling Peter to follow Him. In this account,

³⁴⁶ We also see Jesus modeling this preference for the poor in John’s gospel. The first miracle recorded in the gospel of John (2:1-11) was observed first by humble servants. In the miracle of the wine in Cana of Galilee, Jesus instructs several servants to fill jars of water. The servants obey and took this new wine to the master of the banquet who was amazed at the quality. The servants would have been the first to know this was a miracle, since they had drawn the water, and no attention had been drawn to their simple obedience of filling the jars. We might surmise that Jesus wanted them to receive the blessing of the miracle first in the same way that the Shepherds were the first to hear

Peter *understands himself* in a new light; that he was sinful, *and* that he was chosen.

After the miraculous catch of fish he cried out to Jesus, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8)! According to Jesus, *embracing this paradox of being sinful and yet chosen is how one enters the Kingdom of Heaven*. After reaching the shore, Peter left his boats on the beach and followed his Master.

The third passage relevant to this principle is Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well (John 4). Jesus changes her view of God in that *God shows no partiality*. Even though she was a sinner and a Samaritan woman, He asked her for a drink of water. He changed her view of God in revealing her hidden sins, yet at the same time invited her to enjoy the living water through repentance and belief. He radically *altered her view of God and her self* in revealing that the reason *God hates sin is because sin destroys those whom He loves*. God did not hate her because of her sin, He loved her (John 4:13-18).

Having her wrong views changed, she took the free gift of grace offered to her with great enthusiasm and gratitude. Many of her townspeople believed from the testimony she preached in the streets following this life-changing event by the well. And through this powerful testimony we also see the Disciples recognize that *they had a wrong view of the Samaritans*. Now they had been changed as well: “And they were saying to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the *world*’” (John 4:42, italics added).

There are so many opportunities to challenge young people’s views of God in the wilderness. After having one’s eyes and ears open from being surrounded by God’s

the good news. In the words of Jesus, “...For the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.” This is a different kind of kingdom than the world knows.

creation for a few days, young people often recognize more easily how they have become self-absorbed. This self-absorption commonly manifests itself among young people in several ways: looking down on others who are different, viewing themselves with false superiority toward others, feeling insecurity toward them selves, or living on the basis of entitlement (i.e. believing they deserve a certain standard of life or material comfort rather than maturing into an attitude of gratefulness for the gifts God has given freely). All of these false views of self and God keep us from experiencing true life by dieing to self. The wilderness is a great leveler, bringing one back to reality and giving him a chance to repent and embark on a new path of humility, grace, and gratitude toward God.

New Concepts and Kingdom Strategies are Revealed in the Wilderness

Another principle we glean from Jesus' rhythm of engagement and retreat is that the wilderness is a special place where new concepts of the Kingdom are often communicated and where Kingdom strategy is revealed. One of the qualities each of us is given as image bearers of God is that we are able to think and plan for the purpose of creating and producing something good and fruitful through our efforts. Man naturally plans and develops strategies for growth. Adam was given the task of naming each animal God created and initiating a strategy for ruling and subduing the earth. In Genesis four we see *ingenuity and strategy* first becoming prominent among Lamech's sons.

Jabal became the “the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock” (Genesis 4:20). His brother Jubal became, “the father of all who play the harp and flute” (Genesis 4:21). And Tubal-Cain became the father of metal work, forging “all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron” (Genesis 4:22). The vocations of agriculture, worship-leading, entertainment and metal craft all originated from this family. Strategy and

creativity is a part of our framework as we are created in God's image. Yet, because of our sin and pride, man often uses this capability for self-promotion or vain ambition rather than submitting to the purposes God. *Yet Jesus modeled through His rhythm of retreat a dependence upon prayer and communion with the Heavenly Father to develop strategy for Kingdom growth.*

In the miracle of the large catch of fish where Jesus called Peter to follow Him, this principle is illustrated. Peter had used *his* skill and ingenuity all night, working to bring in a catch of fish to provide for his family, his business, and his fellow workers. This particular night was exhausting and unsuccessful. Then Jesus came to Peter and his friends while they are cleaning and putting away the nets. He climbed into Peter's boat and instructed him to put out into deep water (another wilderness experience) for a catch. Peter reluctantly obeyed because he was tired, but nevertheless trusted Jesus and submitted to Him. After rowing out into deep water, they brought in such a colossal catch of fish that both boats were about to sink.

Peter realized that the only difference between this moment and the night before when he had been in charge (using his ingenuity and strength yet caught no fish) was that Jesus was in his boat now, and it was *He* who *told* him where to drop the nets. And more than this, Peter realized that Jesus had actually crafted this whole experience to show Peter that no longer was he going to rely on *his own ingenuity and strategy*, but now in this moment, Jesus was making a claim on his *whole life*. Peter repented in complete humility. And at this point Jesus *revealed His strategy for Kingdom growth*: "Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men'" (Luke 5:10). Luke records Peter and his friend's life-changing response: "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). The massive catch of fish was

not the issue. It was probably worth a lot of money, but Peter left it and his family business to become (like one of Lamech's sons) *the father of those who catch men*; i.e. the Flock of God, the church. For after confessing that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus replied,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:17-20)

Again, through another example of how *God reveals Kingdom strategy in the wilderness*, Jesus gave further clarification of what the Kingdom strategy for growth was after choosing the Twelve Apostles *on a mountain*. Mark records:

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He *could* send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. (Mark 3:13-15)

After retreating to the mountain to pray, the Father had revealed to Jesus those He was to choose as apprentices. Through prayer the Father showed Jesus who to choose and He gave Him a simple strategy for growing the Kingdom of Heaven. First, Jesus called them to *be with Him*. Second He appointed them to go out and *be verbal with what they knew of the gospel*, i.e. *preach*, and third, they were to *engage in conflict with the enemy* by casting out demons with His authority.³⁴⁷ Jesus, in this brief wilderness experience *on a mountain* gave the Disciples the simple yet life-changing strategy for anyone who would come and follow Him. And the strategy was revealed through *retreat in prayer*.

³⁴⁷ James Edwards, "The Gospels," Lecture delivered to Fuller Theological Seminary, January, 1995, Colorado Springs, CO.

From a brief perusal of mission history, we must agree that there are a wide variety of strategies one could use at different times and in various situations to introduce people to Jesus Christ. From these examples above, we learn that when one decides on a strategy to use, he must not be exclusively pragmatic, i.e. using something that has worked before somewhere else, but rather one needs to seek the Holy Spirit and ask Him to reveal the strategy that is most appropriate in that time and place. The key principle in all these strategies is that *prayer is the way to discern which strategy to employ*. No strategy is all sufficient. Karl Barth once remarked, “The most important theological exercise is prayer....”³⁴⁸ We might add that the most important missiological exercise is also prayer.³⁴⁹ And as we have indicated from Jesus’ life, *He has modeled for us a rhythm of retreat in the wilderness to pray and discern the most appropriate strategy for the mission context we are called to engage.*

Gaining Kingdom Perspective

We also observe through this rhythm of retreat that the wilderness is a special place to gain Kingdom *perspective*. Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well is perhaps the most instructive passage dealing with this principle. When standing on a mountain one has a wonderful perspective of her surroundings. With this perspective one can look 360 degrees and see *where she has come from, where she is, and where she is going*. In this encounter, Jesus, making use of the vantage point from a mountain, first reveals to the Samaritan woman where she had come from by revealing her sinful past and her misunderstanding of worship. Then Jesus showed her where she currently *was*

³⁴⁸ Peter Kuzmič, "Christ and Culture in a Post-Ideological World," Lecture delivered to Doctor of Ministry in Missions and Cross Cultural Studies Cohort, January 27, 2004, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston, MA.

(in relation to the spiritual realm): He said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ‘You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:21-22). And finally Jesus gave her perspective on where He was leading her, i.e. *where she was going*:

But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ‘God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’ (John 4:23-24)

Synopsis: A Rhythm of Engagement and Retreat

We have looked at the ways in which the LORD apprenticed Israel throughout ancient history, and how Jesus modeled the same rhythm of engagement and retreat in His ministry of making apprentices for Himself.³⁵⁰ In the Old Testament this type of *engagement* was initiated by God; leading His people, ministering to them, calling them to live holy lives, and commissioning them to missions. His rest was modeled in the Creation account, and was made an issue of life and obedience within the community of Israel through the Sabbath commandments.

Jesus followed the same pattern; He chose and initiated relationships with His disciples to bring them to full maturity as apprentices. He led them, ministered to them, and trained them. He also modeled the *Missio Dei* by engaging the masses with His message of good news for all people. Finally, since the aim of His ministry was to make mature apprentices who would be fully equipped under His authority to carry on His

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

work of missions to the lost, He modeled a rhythm of rest and retreat in the wilderness before and after engaging the masses. This “resting” in God, in the fullness of His humanness, was the source of His effectiveness; and time after time Jesus took His disciples away into the wilderness *to teach them this principle experientially*.

Just before Jesus ascended to the right hand of God where He is seated today (Colossians 3:1), Jesus sent the Apostles one more time to a *mountain* outside of the city to give them their final commission. We stated in the introduction that the Great Commission account provides an umbrella for our theological framework in that it provides a parabolic/figurative action harkening remembrance of God’s leadership of Israel in the wilderness. In conclusion to part one of our theological framework regarding Jesus’ rhythm of engagement and retreat into the wilderness, we note in the Great Commission account two especially relevant points: 1) Jesus designated for the disciples to retreat *outside of the city*. Jesus chose to send His disciples out of the city one more time for retreat, and it was in the wilderness that He gave them the Great Commission to world missions. 2) The disciples proceeded to the *mountain* He designated (we will speak more about the significance of the *setting* being a mountain later chapter five), and from that mountain, perched above the city the Apostles were able to hear His Word from a vantage point which gave them a unique *perspective*.

Sitting on a mountain top, in a physical sense, the Apostles were able to gain perspective on *where they had come from* (i.e. the path leading up the mountain which they had followed), *where they were* at the moment (on top of a mountain with Jesus having received the revelation and understanding of Jesus’ position as the Son of Man),

³⁵⁰ We find theological support for this principle in Titus 2:14 where the Apostle Paul instructs Titus that Jesus “...gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own

and where they were going (back down the mountain into the cities to engage the lost).

From this *setting* on the mountain they were given a *spiritual perspective*. And most importantly on this special day, Jesus would point them to a path ahead which would lead them to places where they didn't often want to go, but where in the power of the Holy Spirit they would each choose to go joyfully in submission to Christ.

We know from the evangelists who wrote the four Gospel accounts, that each of these Apostles would remember this moment and draw on its significance for the rest of their lives. We too have found *mountain top experiences* in the wilderness to have a similar effect. Through these experiences we can remember the climb and the view with great clarity. And when we most need to remember these moments, is while we walk through our normal lives—*in the valley below*. There is very little living on the mountain top because the environment is too harsh for creatures to thrive. Instead, life is meant to be lived in the valley—so *these times of perspective on the mountain are designed to carve landmarks of perspective into our memory which can fuel new hope as we journey in the valleys below*.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK PART II: WILDERNESS AND MISSIONS; THE EXPERIENTIAL NATURE OF JESUS CHRIST'S APPRENTICESHIP METHODS & THE ROLE OF WILDERNESS EXPERIENCES IN HIS LIFE, MINISTRY, AND TRAINING STRATEGIES

I. Chosen for Missions

Setting and Timing in the Wilderness

So far we have established that the wilderness is a special place for transformation according to the Scriptures. Now we will look specifically at principles related to the *setting* and *timing* of these transforming wilderness experiences. The reason this is important in our thesis is because the Bible teaches that the wilderness as a *place* (i.e. setting) is significant and Jesus preferred it as a place for strategically training His apprentices. As we noted at the outset of the thesis, it seems today that the most commonly the emphasis in teaching the Bible is on the “what” (content), “how” (methods), and “why” (purpose) of Jesus’ teaching, but less emphasis is made on the “where” (setting), and “when” (timing) of His teaching. As we build a theology of wilderness journey, the “where” and “when” of His teaching has importance since the Biblical data indicates with overwhelming evidence that God is concerned with *timing* when He calls His followers. And in His sovereignty the Father crafts the *setting* in which these life-changing wilderness experiences take place.

A primary theological principle which underlies this section of the thesis is that God is the Creator. Thus He has designed and created a landscape for His creatures to

tread, journey, live, and worship. The *setting and landscape of His creation* is important to Him. One very simple apologetic for this view is to observe the qualities of *beauty* and *order* in His Creation. We recognize beauty and order in the outdoors because it is created by God and for God. And creation is in itself an act of love.³⁵¹ This is particularly relevant in working with young people. Outdoor educator, Simon Beames writes, “The power and beauty of wild places may have a profound effect on young people and their sense of vulnerability, while they may take little notice of the natural environment when they are at home.”³⁵²

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (129-203) said, “For even creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him Who made it, and the world manifests Him Who ordered it.”³⁵³ St. Athanasius (297-203) stated:

About the ‘Book of Creation,’ he says, ‘the creatures are like letters proclaiming in loud voices to their Divine Master and Creator the harmony and order of things.’ For this reason, God gave creation such order as is found therein, so that while HE is by nature visible, men might yet be able to know Him through His works.³⁵⁴

St. Augustine (354-430) put it this way,

Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?³⁵⁵

Probably the largest body of evangelistic sermons, poems, and songs related to the outdoors is found in the Psalms. David especially was profoundly shaped by his

³⁵¹ Holmes Rolston III, "The Bible and Ecology," *Interpretation: Journal of Bible and Theology* 50:16-26 (Spring 1996).

³⁵² Beames, 147.

³⁵³ Editor, "Historical Voices on Learning from Creation," *Green Cross*, April, 1996.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

wilderness experiences. In Psalm 8, David writes: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him” (Psalm 8:3-4)?

In the wilderness (through thoughtful observation of creation) we learn that what is seen was not made by what is visible, which points us to the existence of God:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1-3)

In the wilderness David learned to *listen* to the Word of the Lord. His confidence grew through the fear of the Lord:

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. (Psalm 33:6-8)

Through times of solitude in the wilderness, David’s heart was transformed and strengthened by the presence of the Lord:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night,’ Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You. For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. (Psalm 139:7-14)

David was able to spend much of his early life in the wilderness, learning the ways of a shepherd, and learning to be *aware* of God’s presence. His awareness of God caused him to write songs of praise. *Awareness and attentiveness* are often the marks of

someone who spends adequate time in rest and reflection with the Lord. David, in Psalm 148 invokes the whole of creation to praise God in awareness of His glory:

Praise the LORD from the earth, Sea monsters and all deeps; Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word; Mountains and all hills; Fruit trees and all cedars; Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and winged fowl; Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth; Both young men and virgins; Old men and children. Let them praise the name of the LORD, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven. (Psalm 148:7-13)

Several Hebrew prophets also wrote creation psalms to invoke awareness and worship of God. Amos wrote: “For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness and treads on the high places of the earth, The LORD God of hosts is His name” (Amos 4:13). Again, he points to the wonders of creation, attentive to the Lord’s sustaining hand:

He who made the Pleiades and Orion and changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day *into* night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, The LORD is His name. (Amos 5:8)

And Isaiah marvels and worships the Lord in His greatness which is evidenced in His creation:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance And the hills in a pair of scales? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? (Isaiah 40:12-13)

Thus, to re-emphasize, our thesis asserts an understanding of the wilderness as a special place for transformation, not just a metaphor for life. The wilderness has always been a special place where men and women of God have walked and experienced transformation in their relationship with God. The writer of Hebrews punctuates this point: “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). We can

know God more fully and intimately as we walk in the wilderness... quietly allowing our senses and spirit to deepen attentiveness to His voice speaking to us. The following principles related to the special *setting* of the wilderness and the special *timing* of these life-changing experiences will support this view.

Fearful Circumstances Test Belief

First, we observe that God allows fearful circumstances (i.e. timing and setting) to test belief in His followers and to show them that nothing is too difficult for Him to do on their behalf. One cannot imagine how the Israelites must have felt after having escaped Egypt successfully, only to find themselves trapped with the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's chariots closing in behind. *The setting appeared to be hopeless.* It was not a mistake that Moses led them to a beach by the Red Sea. God had led him there. Through these fearful circumstances in the wilderness, God would show Israel once again that He had chosen them for a Divine purpose; nothing is too difficult for Him. We read in Exodus the unfolding of His plan. We observe both elements of setting and timing:

The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. (Exodus 14:19-22)

The setting was fearful, the timing was designed to leave a lasting impression, and the result was *transformation* of His people: "When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).

Similarly, God used timing and setting to bring transformation through the crossing of the Jordan River. Moses, having led the people through the wilderness for forty years blessed Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. They were ready for a land filled with “milk and honey,” they were tired of eating manna and quail. Yet the reason they were in the wilderness in the first place was because of the unbelief of their forefathers. Now, to test their belief again, God had brought Israel to the banks of the Jordan River *at flood stage*.

During much of the year the Jordan is a mere trickle of water, but at harvest time melting snows from the northern mountains cause the Jordan to overflow its banks.³⁵⁶ This was no little stream, and there was no bridge. Why didn’t God choose the dry season to bring them across the river? The text explains that He chose this setting and timing *to amaze them; to transform them*. Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do *wonders* among you (italics added)” (Joshua 3:5). And that is just what happened. The priests exercised their faith and walked into the Jordan holding the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders, and the Lord amazed them by holding the river back in a heap to allow Israel to cross the swollen river. And what was the result? They were transformed. They set up a memorial to remember this amazing event in the wilderness. Soon after this transforming event, they marched on Jericho and brought down its walls through exercising faith in God.

Jesus also was a master of setting and timing in teaching His disciples. He often arranged for His disciples to experience fearful wilderness experiences in order grow their faith. There are many examples of Jesus doing this, but possibly the most

³⁵⁶ Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Barker, Glenn W, *Joshua* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 48.

instructive pericope recorded in the Gospel of Mark is recorded with the backdrop of a long and very tiring day of ministry. When evening came, Jesus instructed the Disciples to go over to the other side of the lake. Leaving the crowd behind so they could withdraw for retreat and rest, they set out across the lake. Mark describes the incident:

And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still.' And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?' They became very much afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?' (Mark 4:37-41)

First we note the element of *timing*. Jesus and His Disciples were *tired*; otherwise Jesus would probably not have fallen into such a deep sleep in the boat. Now we observe the *setting*. Their strength was tested by the treachery of a furious squall to the point that they thought they were going to die. After waking up, Jesus talked to the wind commanding it to halt its fury; and the waves calmed. What an experience that must have been to witness *a conversation between Christ and His creation*. Then Jesus processed the event with the Disciples by asking them why they were afraid and why they had such little faith. In a completely human sense one can easily understand why they were so afraid. Yet Jesus crafted this wilderness experience to show them that *although they had every reason in the world to trust Him, they still lacked belief and trust*. This was a transforming wilderness experience which grew the faith of the Disciples. Could they have learned the same lesson from a lecture hall in the Temple? Or for this lesson was the timing and setting of the raging storm necessary to transform their hearts? The Scriptures seem to indicate the latter to be true.

Mountains are a Special Place where God Establishes and Transfers His Authority to His Ambassadors

Continuing our study of timing and setting, it is interesting to note the prominent use of mountains in Scripture as special settings for encountering God; many times God called His followers to climb mountains to encounter Him. In doing so, He taught them of His authority. When the Israelites finally arrived at Sinai, God called Moses to climb the mountain to meet with Him: “Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel....’” God gave him instructions for the people (Exodus 19:3), then,

The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. “Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them. (Exodus 19:20-22)

Moses and the people humbled themselves before God and listened to His commandments. Only Moses was allowed to ascend the mountain to meet with God, which set him apart as the leader of the people. God had transferred His authority to Moses as His ambassador.³⁵⁷

A New Testament parallel to this experience with Moses occurred eight days after Peter’s confession of Christ, where Jesus affirmed Peter as the leader of the church. In a similar way, Jesus led Peter, James and John up a mountain to encounter God in a special way. As Jesus was praying, He was transfigured before them. Then Peter, James and John witnessed Him speaking with Moses and Elijah about His mission which would culminate in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). Then Luke records:

³⁵⁷ The principle of setting apart leaders in the wilderness is addressed more extensively in the last section of this thesis on leadership training.

While he was saying this, a cloud formed and *began* to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!’ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen. (Luke 9:34-36)

In a similar fashion, this mountain climb resulted in a greater understanding of God’s authority; which would be fully delegated to Jesus Christ after His resurrection. The setting of the mountain was reminiscent of Moses’ encounter with God and the timing was juxtaposed immediately after Peter had publicly confessed Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah King. As we have discussed, after the resurrection, Jesus sent the Disciples once again to a mountain He designated outside of the city. From that mountain Jesus made it clear that He was greater than Moses because He was given power over everything in Heaven and Earth. The writer of Hebrews draws upon this theme: “For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house” (Hebrews 3:3). The mountain from which Jesus gave the Great Commission was a special place where Jesus taught the Disciples of His authority and transferred His authority to them as *His ambassadors*: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-19). The Apostle Paul later reiterates this point to the church at Corinth: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”³⁵⁸

According to the Biblical record, Jesus enjoyed climbing mountains to commune with the Father in prayer. One significant climb occurred the night before He chose the

³⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Twelve Disciples. This account was a parabolic action reminiscent to Moses' ascent Mount Sinai. In similar fashion, after a night of prayer, Jesus called those whom He wanted and they climbed *up* to Him (symbolic of His authority and cover over them) to receive His blessing and commission (Mark 3:13-19). Oscar Seitz in his article, *Love your enemies, the historical setting of Matthew* provides meaningful insight into this habit of Jesus to climb mountains: "Our first evangelist intended to present Jesus on the 'mountain' as the giver of a New Law.... He went up on the mountain... as Moses did to receive the law."³⁵⁹ Therefore we see the parallel between Jesus gathering His disciples to teach them of the Kingdom (and His authority on the mountain), and Moses going up the mountain at Sinai to meet with God, before presenting Israel with the Ten Commandments.

Hunger Can Forge Character and Belief

We will conclude this section regarding timing and setting with three principles related to *timing*. First, *hunger* in the wilderness is often used to forge character and belief. In 1 Kings 19:1-21, we observe Elijah fasting for forty days and forty nights before encountering God in a cave. The timing of His encounter occurred in the midst of great hunger and need. Similarly, in Matthew chapter four we see Jesus fasting forty days and nights in preparation to inaugurate His ministry in conflict with Satan. These events forged strong character for future spiritual battle. The writer of Hebrews notes that Jesus had to *learn obedience through suffering*. Although this is a mystery which we

³⁵⁹ Oscar Jacob Seitz, "Love Your Enemies, the Historical Setting of Matthew 5:43f, Luke 6:27f." *New Testament Studies* 16 (October 1969): 39.

can not fully understand, the Scriptures teach that *even Jesus did not bypass this law of humanity that obedience is learned through adversity* (Hebrews 5:8).

Commenting on one of the more profound hunger-accounts in the New Testament (John 4: 31-34), Peter Scaer writes:

This link between obedience and food is intriguing on any number of levels. It takes us back to the initial creation, where God issued one, and only one, command. Then the food of disobedience led to eternal death and separation from God. AS God began to create a new people for Himself, He also used food as both a gift and a test of obedience.³⁶⁰

Mourning and Prayer

Secondly, we observe that the wilderness is a special place for encountering God through mourning and prayer. Daniel typifies this principle. The immense war in the spiritual realm during the time of Daniel is described in Daniel chapter ten. In this passage we see Daniel mourning and praying—battling in the spiritual realm. Then an Angel appeared to Him by the Tigris River to bless and reassure him. From this encounter we learn that the Angel Gabriel had been fighting the Prince of Persia for over three weeks in order to break through to minister to Daniel in his time of need. Through the Angel Michael’s help, Gabriel passes through this dark kingdom and gives Daniel assurance that his prayers are being answered: Soon the princes of other lands would be defeated in the realm of the spirit.

³⁶⁰ Scaer: 15. John 4: 31-34 says, “The disciples urged him, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat which you do not know.’ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Could someone have brought him something to eat?’ Jesus said, ‘My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.’”

Jesus' Redefining Success and Failure Through the Settings of Fatigue and Discouragement

Third, we note in Jesus' life that He often chose to initiate and teach His disciples in times when they were tired, discouraged, confused, or when they had failed. In Luke five, we see Jesus choosing to call Peter when he was exhausted and discouraged from failure. When Jesus *Himself* was tired, the Father instructed Him to minister to the woman at the well. The example Jesus set for His disciples through His response to the women, even while He was thirsty and fatigued made a strong impression on them.³⁶¹

At the end of His earthly ministry Jesus renewed His call to the Disciples when they were sad, confused and unsuccessful after a night of fishing at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21: 1-14). And finally, on the Road to Emmaus, Jesus revealed Himself to two men who were depressed and confused about Jesus' crucifixion because they thought He was going to be the Messiah King who would free Israel. As they walked Jesus asked questions and wisely concealed their recognition of Him as He sought to discern what the two sojourners really were thinking in regards to the meaning of these events. Then as they rested and broke bread, their eyes were open to see Him (Luke 24:31).

Jesus often revealed Himself and/or Kingdom truth to others when they were tired or discouraged. Wilderness or outdoor experiences with young people provide many opportunities for challenge and adventure which inevitably afford moments of fatigue and discouragement. The perceptive outdoor leader can make the most of these opportunities by pointing young people to our great Comforter, Jesus Christ.

³⁶¹ John 4:27 indicates their amazement that He was talking with the woman: "At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her." John 4:31 shows the Disciples concern for Jesus' hunger: "Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.'"

Perhaps one of the more potent passages where Jesus clearly redefines success for His disciples is found in Luke's record of the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:17-26).

David Tiede writes:

The problem, however, comes when the argument from success becomes self-justifying for the achievers, when those who have received benefits view them as unequivocal signs of divine favor.... Jesus the Messiah assures his disciples that their suffering and apparent lack of benefits which others regard as signs of God's rejection are rather indications of their participation in God's reign which is at odds with the ways of the world in the present time.³⁶²

The world tends to define success in pragmatic, measurable terms. This leads more often than not to ungodly competition, rather than mutually benefiting cooperation for the glory of God. The wilderness is an effective setting for redefining success. Young people often comment at the end of a journey that it was the best week of their lives regardless of the fact that they had to live peaceably in community and mutually serve one another in order for the journey to be a success. This coupled with the fact that they may have eaten different food, bathed very little, shared common gear, and saw each other at their worst (especially in terms of hygiene) helps young people realize what success truly looks like in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' Identity Established in the Wilderness

God is the One Who Chooses His Followers

We have many examples of how God used wilderness experiences to communicate His identity to His people and to establish the identity of His followers in

³⁶² David L. Tiede, "Luke 6:17-26." *Interpretation* 1, no. 40 (January 1986): 64.

relationship to Him. Very simply, He is the one who chooses. *Abraham was chosen and sent into the wilderness as a blessing to all peoples, in contrast to Adam and Eve's being sent into the wilderness as a curse for their rebellion.* Abraham was sent on a journey as a blessing. Through his wilderness journey he continued to discern and form his personal call and His family's corporate call as part of the *Missio Dei* (Genesis 12:1-13:18).

During the journey the LORD reveals to Abraham that the time is at hand for Sarah to bear a son. God had set apart Abraham and called him to a special relationship. Nahum Sarnah comments:

In the Bible is not essentially intellectual activity, not simply the objective contemplation of reality. Rather, it is experiential, emotional, and, above all relational. Thus, in [Genesis] 18:19, when God says of Abraham, 'I have singled him out' or to Israel, in Amos 3:2, 'You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth,' the true connotation is 'I have entered into a special relationship with you.'³⁶³

Jacob was also called in a special way *in the wilderness* at the ford of the Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-32). He wrestled with God to receive a blessing, and the Lord established His identity by giving him a *new name*.³⁶⁴ Our final example is Daniel. Standing in solitude by the river Tigris after seeking the Lord in prayer, the Angel Gabriel appeared and told him, "You are highly esteemed" (Daniel 10:11, 18). God had sent Gabriel to establish Daniel's position before Him; that he was highly esteemed, that God had heard him, and that He had sent His angels to battle in the spiritual realm to answer his prayers.

Jesus also followed the Old Testament model by *choosing His disciples in the wilderness*. Mark indicates that Jesus called and identified the Twelve in the wilderness on a mountain:

³⁶³ Sarnah, 31.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He *could* send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), and James, the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, ‘Sons of Thunder’); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot;¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him. (Mark 3:13-19)

At the close of Jesus’ ministry on Earth, after His resurrection, He once again established the identity of His disciples in the wilderness beside the Sea of Tiberias. In this account we see Jesus’ concern for Peter’s identity being anchored in Him. Jesus established his identity in relation to Him first by confronting him one on one. Similar to Peter, we also are tempted to choose the path of our friends because of identity issues, but in the wilderness Jesus said to Peter, “You follow me.” Peter is addressed personally and must identify with Him only. So must we.

God Interrupts Those Whom He Chooses

Another principle which comes to light as we survey the Scripture is that the *wilderness is a place where God interrupts those He chooses*. At the Tower of Babel, God interrupted His people to shape them according to His will (Genesis 11:1-9). God came to see what they were doing—He took initiative (Genesis 11:5). When the angels announced the birth of Jesus Christ to the Shepherds they *interrupted* them in the middle of the night:

In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:8-11)

We also see a similar encounter when Saul met Jesus on the Road to Damascus. It is interesting and perhaps symbolic that Saul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus occurred near the same area in centuries past where God, after whispering to him in the cave, had sent Elijah to travel through (the Damascus wilderness) to anoint Hazael king over Aram (1 Kings 19:9b-15). Similar to Elijah's interruption in a desert cave on Mount Horeb, on a lonely desert road, Jesus interrupted Saul to shape his vision and to commission him to missions as he had done with Elijah centuries before:

As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He *said*, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do. (Acts 9:3-6)

From these and other examples in our study³⁶⁵ we have observed a similar pattern of interruption at work:

1. God interrupts those He chooses.
2. He questions them to find out what they are thinking.
3. God/Jesus introduces Himself or introduces his Son as the Chosen One of God.
4. He invokes those He chooses to listen to Him and go on a new mission (i.e. being sent).
5. God/Jesus leaves and the new believer is led by the Counselor, the Holy Spirit.

We see this model unfold also in Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian Enoch in the wilderness:³⁶⁶

1. Philip was sent to the Eunuch.
2. Philip interrupted the man in his chariot.
3. He questioned him.

³⁶⁵ Other examples include Peter, Elijah, Abraham, and Jacob's call. We also see the same pattern at work in God's speaking to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had eaten of the forbidden fruit, etc. This pattern can be generally applied to numerous interruption accounts where the LORD or Jesus interrupts those He is choosing.

³⁶⁶ This account is found in Acts chapter eight.

4. He introduced him to Jesus Christ and baptized him.
5. He sent the man on his way; on a new mission.
6. He left, entrusting the man to the Holy Spirit's leadership.

D.T. Niles (1908-1970), who was an indigenous mission leader in Sri Lanka once said, “In our part of the world, the preacher, the evangelist, is engaged in the work of disrupting people’s lives.”³⁶⁷ As we seek to share the gospel with young people, a strategy which involves interrupting their lives is necessary. And God has often used the wilderness as a place to interrupt those who He has called. By facilitating wilderness experiences which provide ample opportunity for young people to be still and listen to God, we can trust that God will interrupt those whom He wants to interrupt (Psalm 46:10).

Identity

Even as the wilderness is a place where God has established the identity of His followers, the *wilderness was also a special place where He established Jesus' identity as His Chosen One, the Messiah*. The Lord visited Abraham and Sarah to give them the good news of the birth of their son Isaac. In this account, Abraham recognized the Lord and ran to Him. Then he brought water and washed His and His attendant’s feet (Genesis 18:1-33). God had revealed Himself to Abraham, and he washed His feet in humility and gratitude. Jesus later *reverses this act of service as a symbol of His humility and humanity when He washes the feet of His Disciples* (John 13). We have also found washing one another’s feet in the wilderness as a powerful way to teach the principle of

³⁶⁷ Creighton Lacy, *American Society of Missiology Series*, eds. Gerald H. Anderson, Robert T. Coote, Norman A. Horner, James M. Phillips, *Mission Legacies; Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994): 363.

servant hood. With weathered feet from the trail, each person is humbled by this act of service.

Jesus' first activity in ministry was to go out to the wilderness to be baptized by John. Then, in a remarkable moment, *God established His identity* before those who witnessed His baptism by blessing Him as His one and only Son in whom He took great pleasure:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased. (Mark 1:9-11)

At a different time, Jesus asked the Disciples who the people were saying He was. After their response, in a more personal tone He asked them who *they* thought He was. After questioning them, Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah. His identity was established once again (Mark 8:27-30). Later, on the very unique occasion of the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father made known to the Three that Jesus was His Chosen One and instructed them to listen to Him (Luke 9:28-36). By way of application, as we personally invite young people to join us on wilderness experiences, we are non-verbally communicating to them that we have *chosen* them to journey with us. To be chosen (like the disciples were) is every person's greatest longing, and to be chosen by someone today is just as transforming as it was for Peter, James, and John.

In regard to Jesus' identity being revealed in the wilderness, Joshua Paul Smith makes an important statement:

[Jesus] did not draw people into the wilderness but was revealed in it. This is precisely what John himself says of Jesus in John 1:31, 'I myself did not know him but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel. Previously unknown to either John or the people as the one to come, Jesus is revealed by means of his desert baptism.... He did not lead people into the

wilderness to experience the saving activity of God; he was the saving activity, the very divine visitation, they had gone out to see.³⁶⁸

This perception is helpful to the outdoor leader in that the wilderness experiences with young people are not a *way to connect with Jesus*—instead, Jesus Himself is the way. Young people may have many reasons for participating in a wilderness adventure, but we can be confident that Jesus will reveal Himself to them in the wilderness if He so chooses. This is God’s timing and God’s work. We lead young people into the wilderness and we share the message of the gospel—but God is the one who reveals His Son to those whom He chooses (John 6:44).³⁶⁹

Our final example of how *the wilderness is a special place where God established the identity and authority of His Son* is found in our unifying passage for this study, the Great Commission: “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Jesus began His commissioning words with the assurance that He had the authority to commission them because He was the Son of God.

II. Training and Preparation for Missions: Testing Exposes Unbelief and Establishes Belief and Character

So far in our theological framework we have established an understanding of the rhythmic habit of engagement and retreat in Jesus’ life, as well as the importance of timing and setting within these wilderness experiences. Next we will interact with several principles regarding the wilderness as a *special place where God tests His people*

³⁶⁸ Smith, 30-31.

³⁶⁹ John 6:44 reads: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day.”

in order to expose unbelief and to establish belief, i.e. God is committed to developing character in His people.

Expanding Comfort Zones, Removing Familiarity, to Keep Men Humble

First we will look at how the wilderness is a place where God expands comfort zones to keep men humble and dependent on Him. Again, one of the first examples of this occurs at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). The people of ancient civilization had become confident, self-sufficient, and comfortable. Seeing this as a danger, God pressed them outside of their comfort zone by confusing their language. He scattered them throughout the wilderness with many languages to keep them dependent on Him.

Later we see this principle come to light through Abraham's calling to mission (Genesis 12:1-13:18). One obvious feature of his calling was the intentionality God expressed in removing *familiarity* and *comfort* for the purpose of blessing all peoples through him (Genesis 12:17-18). Familiarity is a blessing and a curse in every culture. We can rest when we are familiar with our environment (i.e. culture; family, music, food, surroundings, art, etc.), but familiarity can also lead to complacency. Wilderness journeys were used by God to remove familiarity (i.e. comfort zones), for the purpose of sending His children into mission, to the peoples who were estranged from God. One can relate to the concept of expanding comfort zones if he has experienced being an alien in a culture. This is a humbling experience and usually causes a change of heart toward those different from one's native culture—because we know how it feels to be a foreigner.

After the author's first mission travel, upon returning to the United States he had a new sense of compassion and understanding toward foreigners living in his native culture. We see how God, through stretching Abraham's comfort zone, causing him to

sojourn as an alien, developed in him a heart of compassion and understanding for the lost. *God's mission is to seek and save the lost through His chosen people and He saw it was necessary to first humble them by making them aliens so that they would be a mission-committed people, with compassion for those outside their family.* They had to wear the shoes of a foreigner first to gain a heart and vision for reaching out to the nations estranged from God.

Familiarity is a danger for the church even today. The moment we become comfortable and over-familiar with our own culture, we tend to disregard those who are foreign to our “family.” This principle has direct implications for the church in the West: *Mission-commitment in the church is dependent on God's people being pushed into unfamiliarity (i.e. wilderness or cross cultural experiences) in order to develop compassion for the lost.* Remaining comfortable hardens the heart of the church for the lost... we must live and feel as aliens or strangers in the world to remain a *missional* church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached this message to challenge what he felt was an often overly-comfortable-theology of Karl Barth (he thought his views failed to adequately relate to everyday life).³⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer’s message was that our freedom in Christ is *for* the world, not *from* the world. This is a message for today’s young generation of leaders to embrace, in order to find relevant social interpretations for missions. As Bonhoeffer asserts, “Every Christian doctrine has a social intention.”³⁷¹

God will continue to push His people out of their comfort zone to keep them humble and mission-committed. Wilderness experiences with young people provide limitless opportunities for stretching comfort zones; sleeping on the ground, few baths,

³⁷⁰ John D. Godsey, “Barth and Bonhoeffer.” *Christian History*: 32 (Vol. X, No.4): 24.

different food, no media to cause distraction, physical demands, and visiting the toilet in the woods, etc. Jesus' goal is to purify for Himself a people who are transformed; a people who are a possession for Himself who will eagerly lay their lives down to desire only one thing: God's good, pleasing and perfect will (Titus 2:14, Romans 12:1-2). And the unavoidable reality is that this singleness of heart that God desires is usually developed and shaped through trials and suffering.

Ethnic Prejudice versus Extreme Generosity

As mentioned above, the reason why God seeks to extend our comfort zones is to create and renew mission-commitment in His people. As long as we remain comfortable, we often lack the zeal to extend compassion toward those who are estranged from Him. This has particular implications today for expanding our *cultural* comfort zones. Do people naturally extend grace across cultures? Ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, mankind has had an inclination to favor his "own" kind—his own culture. Wilderness experiences often break down these prejudices through helping participants see one's broken humanity, and thus his equality with everyone else; one is no "better" than anyone else—we are just as weak as the next person. We hunger, we thirst. We get tired, and we all produce bodily odors. We become agitated, fatigued, lonely, afraid, etc. Through this realization of our broken humanity, we are transformed inwardly to become more able to engage in missions because we see ourselves properly as God sees us; "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God *sees* not as man sees, for man looks at the outward

³⁷¹ Ibid., 24.

appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The Macedonian church provides a good example of a community of people who saw themselves equal with others and thus were commended by Paul for their extreme generosity:

And now, brothers we want you to know about the grace that has been given to the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability.... (2 Corinthians 8: 1-3)

Their generosity came through trials and poverty which gave them a godly perspective toward other peoples. Paul commends them for their extreme generosity in supporting the Jerusalem church in the midst of their poverty even though they themselves were extremely *stretched* by their own trials. They stepped out of their comfort zones and familiarity to extend generosity toward others with support and encouragement.

One of the thickest walls of comfort is the familiarity of our own culture which causes us to be sinfully prejudiced toward other cultures. For that reason, in order to advance the Kingdom of God among all peoples, God has often purposed to break down dividing walls of hostility:

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens..... Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:1, 18)

We find, especially in the context of outdoor adventures, many opportunities for young people to stretch their comfort zones. Simon Beames agrees: “... The outdoors provides natural consequences for participants’ actions or non-actions.”³⁷² One of the comfort zones commonly stretched among young people is in the realm of personal responsibility.

³⁷² Beames, 147.

For example, when young people leave their gear out in the open during the night, they discover that the rain or dew has soaked their clothing—this lesson needs only to be learned once. Expanding personal comfort zones helps develop responsibility, maturity and competency in young people; resulting in higher levels of confidence and resiliency—which are among the greatest needs of adolescents.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is possibly our most instructive body of Scripture regarding the way in which God has purposed to test true belief among His people through removing the familiar—to expand comfort zones. Much of the context of the author of Hebrews' commentary is based on the lessons learned from Israel's rebellion and wanderings in the wilderness. He writes:

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.... (Hebrews 3:12-14)

Continuance is an Indicator of Covenant Relationship

In the first half of the letter to the Hebrews we learn a principle of testing: *Continuing* on the journey by faith is the test of reality—*our continuance is an assurance of our belonging to God*, i.e. He disciplines those He loves. The writer of this letter speaks at great length about the rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness at *Meribah*. We learn that the reason the Hebrew people were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land was because of their unbelief. And the message of the writer of Hebrews to his audience was that this principle remains true throughout the ages. Beginning well with Christ is not the test of reality, rather the continuance of our belief and submission to His authority is the sign of our belonging to Him.

In Hebrews chapter five, we see how the expanding of Israel's comfort zones in the wilderness broke their laziness and disbelief. We see this lesson in our own lives in that when we are stretched or challenged, we become more dependent on Christ; He forces us to sever old ties which hold us back. The writer warns against falling away in our faith: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12). The author's Hebrew audience was sluggish; they had settled down and were comfortable. Going further in their faith would mean that they would have to sever old ties. F.F. Bruce comments: "The intellect is not over-ready to entertain an idea that the heart finds unpalatable."³⁷³ We need young leaders today to respond to this message, to sever old ties, forging new paths in missions to the lost—free of the snares and shackles of familiarity and comfort.

Bruce explains that the contrast between mild and solid (spiritual) food was a common subject in early church. Paul writes to the church at Corinth: "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1). And Peter writes: "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation..." (1 Peter 2:2). Peter was writing to a church of primarily *new* converts. Yet here in the Letter to the Hebrews, the audience is those who are *mature, yet sluggish* in their faith. These "mature" Christians had built up a standard of righteousness by which they were passing discriminating judgment on moral situations, yet their hearts remained resistant to change and non-

³⁷³ F.F Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistle to the Hebrews; Revised*, 136.

committal toward missions.³⁷⁴ This same heart condition was cause for the Lord to initiate the transforming wilderness experience Israel experienced at the end of Moses' life; hence the occasion of the epistle.

Severing Old Ties

Due to the Fall, man does not naturally sever old ties, but rather holds on to what he knows, i.e. the comforts and familiarity of his sinful nature. This is why Paul wrote similarly in his letter to the Colossians these instructions to sever their old ties:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:1-11)

Again, he gave similar instruction to the church in Rome:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:5-11)

Shedding Spiritual Binders

Through the expansion of our comfort zones in the wilderness, spiritual blinders are removed which open our eyes to the reality of the spiritual realm where missions are advanced through prayer. This is possibly one of the most important fruits of transformation that comes through wilderness experiences. We live in a society which disregards the spiritual realm as imaginary or unreal. Yet God's Word clearly teaches that only through prayer are we able to discern what God is *thinking*, and thus hear from Him what He would like us to *do in mission*. Since we, in our busy society often lack the discipline to quietly listen to God in prayer, wilderness experiences are needed even more so that young people can have opportunities to experience solitude to hear God speaking to them. The Apostle Paul explains this principle that *spiritual blinders are removed through prayer* in the first letter to Corinthian church, where he explains this mysterious reality in simple earthly analogy. He writes:

But just as it is written, “**THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.**” For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:9-16)

In other words, a man has no way of knowing the thoughts of another unless the other person reveals his thoughts to him. We similarly cannot know the thoughts of God unless His Spirit reveals His thoughts to us. Unless we are in a posture of listening and communing with God through prayer and His Word, we will not know His thoughts. Thus, only through prayer are our spiritual blinders removed. These *binders hinder us from “continuing in our faith and belief”* which the writer of Hebrews exhorts to his audience is the mark of true belief. Mankind is tempted to believe lies and is entangled by many hindrances as he remains sluggish and “prayer-less”. E.M. Bounds gives instructions to guard against “prayerlessness”:

Prayerless praying by lips and hearts untrained in prayer, by lives out of harmony with Jesus Christ; prayerless praying, which has the form and motion of prayer but is without the true heart of prayer, never moves God to an answer. It is of such praying that James said, “Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”³⁷⁵

The wilderness is a special place where God has removed spiritual blinders through leading His people into discomfort and suffering in order to open their eyes to His glory and goodness. The result is unhindered belief and trust in Him, which transforms the believer, fanning into flame the light of the gospel which shines in the darkness. The believer, through faith and prayer submits his mind to be “controlled by the Spirit” and thus begins to experience “life and peace” (Romans 8:11). Life and peace are marks of transformation. And one walking in life and peace will surely be more committed to missions; having the “feet of good news” for the lost which Paul describes.

³⁷⁵ E.M Bounds et al., *E.M. Bounds on Prayer* (New Kinsington: Whitaker House, 1997), 76. Bounds indicates he is drawing his theological view from James 4:2-3.

Discovering Who Sets the Terms of Discipleship

From a theological perspective, the stubborn essence of one's personal comfort zone is that he or she has set the terms of his relationship with God. Yet in reality, Jesus is the one who sets the terms of our relationship with Him, not us. Michael Knowles explores this idea in the Parable of the Unworthy Servant (Luke 17:7-10). Quoting John Calvin, he writes: "The object of this parable is to show that all the zeal manifested by us in discharging our duty does not put God under any obligation to us by any sort of merit; for, as we are his property, so he on his part can owe us nothing."³⁷⁶ In this parable, the follower is denied setting the terms of discipleship... his relationship is on the master's terms and the master is by nature good. Knowles continues, "And the second half [of the parable] denies the possibility that service for God is intrinsically meritorious.... Discipleship is not self-determined, and that one is not compensated according to one's merits, but on some other principle."³⁷⁷ Thus we learn through the expanding of our comfort zones, through the removal of familiarity, and through the discipline of the Master, a crucial principle which is foundational to enjoying the abundant life that Christ desires for us to enjoy: *Being a disciple does not give us a special status—there are no benefits or bonuses for service.*

Part of the art of guiding outdoor adventure experiences involves taking advantage of opportunities to challenge comfort zones by modeling the principle in this parable. We can often set the terms of an activity for young people rather than allowing them to set the terms of the experience (i.e. defining boundaries, facilitating adventure, communicating aspects of the journey which are not optional (like eating and drinking)

³⁷⁶ Knowles, 297.

for safety, health, etc.). In the wilderness setting, young people will naturally recognize in humility that they do not know more than their “master”, i.e. their guide becomes a living parable to their relationship with Jesus in that the outdoor leader is a “master” of his or her craft of leading in the outdoors whereas young people know they do not have the skill to survive and thrive in the outdoors on their own. Thus young people recognize that it will be best for them to apprentice their leader. We have found that young people often discover this living *incarnational* parable on their own by the end of the week which helps them relate the experience to their relationship with their true guide, Jesus Christ when they go home to the city.

The Spirit is Willing but the Flesh is Weak

As our comfort zones are stretched through various forms of testing, our humanity is exposed. Thus we identify another principle of testing; *the wilderness is a place where testing exposes the reality of our humanity and the inadequacy of our worship.* Jesus stated in the Garden of Gethsemane to the Twelve, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:32-42). When we are faced with this truth about our selves, we are more prepared to accept the invitation to experience abundant life through relying on the Spirit rather than our own strength. We also see this principle identified in the Great Commission passages. When the Disciples arrive at the mountain to which Jesus instructed them to climb to meet Him outside of the city, Matthew records, “When they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful” (Matthew 28:16). Again they doubted, even after witnessing the events of the crucifixion, after hearing the reports of

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 298.

those who had seen Jesus raised from the dead, and after seeing Jesus in the upper room when He appeared to them. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

The temptation of Christ (Luke 4:1-3) was also a form of flesh-testing which deepened Jesus' dependence on the Father. The writer of Hebrews comments on his understanding of the significance of Jesus' suffering during His life on earth:

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7-10)

The temptation in the wilderness tested Jesus' humanity. We learn from this encounter with Satan that the Enemy, the Devil appealed to the *deity* and power of Christ, whereas Christ held firmly to His weakness and humanity—depending on God, in the face of trial. Johannes B. Metz, in his book *Poverty of Spirit*, provides important insight concerning this strategy of Satan:

To become man means to become 'poor', to have nothing which one might brag about before God. To become man means to have no support and no power, save the enthusiasm and commitment of one's own heart. Becoming man involves proclaiming the poverty of the human spirit in the face of the total claims of a transcendent God.

With the courageous acceptance of such poverty, the divine epic of our salvation began. Jesus held back nothing; he clung to nothing and nothing served as a shield for him. Even his true origin did not shield him; 'HE... did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself' (Phil. 2:6).

Satan, however, tries to obstruct this self-renunciation, this thoroughgoing 'poverty'. He wants to make Jesus strong, for what he really fears is the powerlessness of God in the humanity he has assumed. He fears the Trojan horse of an open human heart that will remain true to its native poverty, suffer the misery and abandonment that is man's, and thus save mankind. Satan's temptation is an assault on God's self-renunciation, an enticement to strength,

security and spiritual guidance; for these things will obstruct God's saving approach to man in the dark robes of frailty and weakness.

Satan tries to appeal to the divinity of Jesus; he tempers with the gravity and grandeur of his humanity. (As a matter of fact, Satan always tries to stress the spiritual strength of man and his divine character. He has done this from the beginning. 'You will be like God': that is Satan's slogan. It is *the* temptation he has set before men in countless variations, urging us to reject the truth about the humanity we have been given).

Satan joins hands with Docetism and Monophysitism. He wants God to remain simply God. He wants the Incarnation [God becoming man] to be an empty show, where God dresses up in a human costume but doesn't really commit himself to this role. He wants to make the Incarnation a piece of mythology, a divine puppet show. That is his strategy for making sure that the earth remains exclusively his, and man too.³⁷⁸

Through the expanding of our comfort zones in wilderness experiences, Jesus shapes in us the openness of heart that will "remain true to its native poverty, suffer the misery and abandonment that is man's, and thus save mankind."³⁷⁹ What a compelling message for young people today! Young people are naturally idealistic and are able to embrace a compelling vision... they need to hear that through humility and abandonment they can play a significant role in Jesus' mission to "save mankind." Jesus modeled transformation-through-suffering in the wilderness, and we frequently see God working the same way through challenge, suffering, and discomfort in order to create a people who will bring salvation to mankind *through poverty, not power.*

In a parallel argument, Paul indicates the same principle at work in Titus' life, as he encourages him to faithfully teach and exhort the church in Crete to continue in their belief, denying the cravings of their flesh to produce fruit of the Spirit:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly

³⁷⁸ Johannes B. Metz, *Poverty of Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1968): 14-15.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 15.

in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. (Titus 2:11-15)

God is Sole Provider

Thus far we have looked at how God uses wilderness experiences to lead His chosen people into situations where their comfort zones are expanded, resulting in transformation. He establishes their belief in Him causing brokenness and mission-commitment by breaking down barriers between other people through exposing their humanity (i.e. their equality with others). He breaks down barriers between them selves and Himself through removing spiritual blinders through prayer, resulting in a people who know the thoughts of God and walk with Him in singleness of heart and devotion. As we follow the theme of “belief” we also find that the wilderness is a place where God tests our belief in Him as our sole Provider. In Genesis 22:1-19, God test Abraham with Isaac’s life. God tests his belief and trust by asking for the sacrifice of what is most dear to him—his son Isaac. From the mountain, Abraham perseveres through his test and finishes well:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; *it was he* to whom it was said, “IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.” He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

Further examples illustrate how God established trust as His people’s sole Provider throughout the Old Testament. In Exodus 15:22-27 (a parallel record of this account is found in Numbers 20:8-14 where the Israelites grumble and rebel against God at *Meribah*) we see Him providing water for the people from a rock. In Exodus 16:1-7

He provides manna, and in Exodus 16:8-21, He provides meat in the form of quail. Even despite grumbling, God provides. This is undeserved grace. Jesus also illustrates the same principle of *undeserved grace* from the Heavenly Father as Provider in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

Commenting on the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1-16), Michael Knowles identifies a similar theme. The grumblers in the parable have missed the point that God is Provider and that He is fair. Knowles writes: “When the grumblers accuse the owner of unfairness, the only injustice in the situation is their own selfishness.”³⁸⁰ Thus the only injustice of *our complaints* to God for unfair treatment is our own selfishness.

Perhaps one of the most instructive New Testament passages regarding this principle of provision is found in John 6:1-15. After looking around to see the crowd coming toward Him, Jesus tests Philip saying, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat” (John 6:6)? John parenthetically comments: “He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”³⁸¹ Philip was confused and lacked the belief Jesus desired in Him. So Jesus modeled this principle of provision before their very eyes. To make the point that *He was aiming the lesson of this miracle at the Twelve* to transform their belief in Him as Provider, Jesus instructs them to *gather up the pieces*. In the end, they gathered twelve basketfuls of scraps; enough for each disciple to have his own basket.

Did they get the point? Unfortunately their hearts were still hardened by unbelief. So, immediately Jesus sent the Twelve on a wilderness experience across the lake to truly

³⁸⁰ Knowles, 301.

transform their hearts. Mark the Evangelist recalls this sequence of events in Mark 6:45-52. After walking out to them in the middle of the storm and calming the waves, Jesus climbed in the boat to settle their fears. Mark notes, “They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened” (Mark 6:51-52). From this experience we learn that Jesus modeled the same *commitment to total transformation* as His Father did in the wilderness wanderings of Israel where He *repeatedly* tested them to *shape a* whole-hearted relationship with Him built on trust. So we may assert, from this study, that the chief aim of life-changing wilderness experiences which God and Jesus initiated was to *establish belief* among His children.

Believe and Worship Him Alone

The wilderness is a place where God establishes our belief in *Him and no other*. Soon after Abram set out from his country to follow God into the wilderness, the Lord came to him in a vision to remind him of the covenant He had made with him. He did this in order to strengthen Abram’s trust after he had rescued Lot. In this vision, God promises Abram a son through which salvation will come to all peoples. After the vision the writer of Genesis states, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). Nahum Sarnah comments:

The scene that opens with fear and depression closes with a firm statement that Abram remains steadfast in his faith in God. The promises must be realized, even in the face of a seemingly recalcitrant reality.³⁸²

Later in Abraham’s desert journey, the Lord reveals that the time is at hand for his wife Sarah to become pregnant with the child He promised (Genesis 18:1-33). In their old

³⁸¹ Ibid.

age, God tests he and Sarah's belief. Sarah wanes and laughs when she hears that she will bear a child, to which the LORD replies, "*Is anything too difficult for God*" (Genesis 18:14)? It is interesting to note that the Angel Gabriel utters the same phrase to Mary the mother of Jesus, as she wonders out loud how it is that she will bear a child as a virgin: "*For nothing is impossible with God*" (Luke 1:37)!

When Jesus paused on the mountain in Samaria to rest from His journey, we see again how Jesus took advantage of an opportunity to bless a Samaritan woman with new freedom—to believe and draw near to the One who she was created to worship. Peter Scaer describes this bursting forth of the Kingdom of God into the life of an unsuspecting sinner (to which she had much cause for a worshipful response):

Through His evangelism of the Samaritan woman, He also prepared her for worship. This worship must be through Him as mediator. Furthermore, He prepared her, as representative of the church, to see that worship must also be to Him, who is true God who had made Himself known even in the Old Testament.³⁸³

God Questions Men to Establish Belief and Integrity

Job, another man who typifies a life of faith, is reported in the Wisdom literature to have been tested severely by a similar line of *questioning as did Sarah and Mary* in order to establish his belief. In Job 39 God speaks to Job about the creation and its beings:

Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer? "Can you count the months they fulfill, Or do you know the time they give birth? "They kneel down, they bring forth their young, They get rid of their labor pains. "Their offspring become strong, they grow up in the open field; They leave and do not return to them. "Who sent out the wild donkey free? And who

³⁸² Sarna, 113.

³⁸³ Scaer, 12.

loosed the bonds of the swift donkey, To whom I gave the wilderness for a home
And the salt land for his dwelling place? (Job 39:1-6)

God continued this line of questioning in regard to His power shown in His *creatures*:

Behold now, Behemoth, which I made as well as you; He eats grass like an ox.
‘Behold now, his strength in his loins And his power in the muscles of his belly.
‘He bends his tail like a cedar; The sinews of his thighs are knit together. ‘His
bones are tubes of bronze; His limbs are like bars of iron. ‘He is the first of the
ways of God; Let his maker bring near his sword. ‘Surely the mountains bring
him food, And all the beasts of the field play there. ‘Under the lotus plants he lies
down, In the covert of the reeds and the marsh. ‘The lotus plants cover him with
shade; The willows of the brook surround him. ‘If a river rages, he is not
alarmed; He is confident, though the Jordan rushes to his mouth. ‘Can anyone
capture him when he is on watch, With barbs can anyone pierce *his* nose?’ (Job
40:15-24)

‘Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook? Or press down his tongue with a
cord? ‘Can you put a rope in his nose Or pierce his jaw with a hook? ‘Will he
make many supplications to you, Or will he speak to you soft words? ‘Will he
make a covenant with you? Will you take him for a servant forever? ‘Will you
play with him as with a bird, Or will you bind him for your maidens? ‘Will the
traders bargain over him? Will they divide him among the merchants? ‘Can you
fill his skin with harpoons, Or his head with fishing spears? ‘Lay your hand on
him; Remember the battle; you will not do it again! ‘Behold, your expectation is
false; Will you be laid low even at the sight of him? ‘No one is so fierce that he
dares to arouse him; Who then is he that can stand before Me? ‘Who has given to
Me that I should repay *him*? *Whatever* is under the whole heaven is Mine.’ (Job
41:1-11)

At long last, through Job’s confession we see the transforming power of God’s
questioning. The result is trust and belief of the highest quality which is what we find
brings glory to God. *Our belief is His aim:*

Then Job answered the LORD and said, ‘I know that You can do all things, And
that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without
knowledge?’ ‘Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things
too wonderful for me, which I did not know.’ ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will
ask You, and You instruct me.’ ‘I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.’
(Job 42:1-6)

Ultimately, God is concerned most about the integrity of His children. Just as an
architect is concerned about the integrity of the foundation and cornerstone before he

begins to build, the Heavenly Father works in our heart of flesh to prepare us as His Temple; to put God on display and bring glory to Him in our sphere of influence. See Seng Tan also relates Job's testing to an experience of integrity-building:

Much like the book of Job, Yahweh deploys the people of Israel in the wilderness in order to test their integrity. In Moses' words: 'Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands' (Deut. 8:2)³⁸⁴

We learn through the experiences of God's children that there is a fine line between trusting and testing God... God tests us, we do not test Him!

To be sure, we are not to test God. Yet OT stories of Yahweh's treasured servants suggest that the Biblical text allows for instances wherein faithful and obedient servants of the Most High, in seeking redress from theodic crises, have come to know and experience him in terrifying, but truly satisfying way.³⁸⁵

Belief is Shown to be True or False in the Wilderness

We have established through the Old Testament record that in the wilderness, God tests the belief of His people. Continuing in our study we discover that through various forms of trials and testing in the wilderness, Israel's belief was shown either to be true or false. Either their belief led to repentance, or a lack of belief led them to a further hardening of the heart, as we see modeled at the rebellion against Moses at *Meribah* (Exodus 17:1-7).

As we turn to the New Testament account regarding the establishment of belief through testing and questioning in the wilderness, we have several instructive passages to consider; all of which have been treated in previous sections of this study so we will only

³⁸⁴ See Seng Tan, "A Double Reading of the 'Wilderness' Narratives: Implications for Old Testament Theology." no. 42 (2000): 161.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 166.

provide a brief summary. When Jesus stills the storm in Mark 4:35-41, he *questioned* the Twelve, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Although their fears are well understood since the storm was about to capsize their boat, they still were considered to have lacked faith because of inadequate belief in Jesus as the Son of God. Then the Twelve confess their state of unbelief in saying, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him” (Mark 4:41). The wilderness is a place where *unbelief is exposed*.

The Twelve were also tested at the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15). Through this test, Jesus *questions* Philip as to what they ought to do to satisfy the hunger of the masses. Philip’s response revealed his (and the Disciples) lack of faith, so Jesus unfolded a pair of miracles to soften their hearts towards authentic belief. First, as mentioned above, He fed the crowds and left enough basketfuls for each Disciple to have more food than they needed. Then because he knew they still did not understand what had happened Jesus sent them on an adventurous wilderness experience across the lake in order to expose their unbelief (Mark 6:45-52).

In this particular miracle we see the intentionality of Jesus in sending His disciples on a wilderness-type experience that would inevitably produce life change. How was He intentional? First, Jesus sent the disciples on ahead of Him. They had to go through this storm without Him. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray (Mark 6:46). Mark notes that when evening came, the Twelve were in the *middle* of the lake. Jesus was able to see the disciples straining at the oar from the mountain top. He watched as the wind was against them. This was part of the plan—Jesus was watching the events of the evening unfold—waiting for the moment when He would step in to save them. Later in the night Jesus went out to them. He was “about to pass by them”, (Mark

6:48) when they saw Him walking on the lake. Mark comments that they thought He was a ghost, so Jesus spoke to them saying, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” (Mark 6:50). Then he climbed in the boat and the wind died down. Mark highlights the reason for the experience was to *expose their unbelief*: “They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened” (Mark 6:51-52). Here in this account we see how *Jesus intentionally crafted a wilderness experience to expose unbelief in order to establish true belief*. He could have rebuked them on the beach after the miracle of the five thousand for not believing, but He chose instead to send them on an experience that would stretch them physically and emotionally in order to prove once again that there is no other One worthy of their faith besides Him and Him alone.

A Theology of Belief-Testing in the Wilderness: The Letter to the Hebrews

Continuing our development of the principle that *in the wilderness God establishes our belief*, we must turn to the Letter of the Hebrews for some crucial insight. As we follow the theme of transformation through wilderness experiences in the Scriptures, The book of Hebrews serves as a *commentary* explaining the implications of what happened in the wilderness with the Israelites. The writer has identified this theme and its importance to instruct his contemporary readers in ancient lessons relevant to their modern context. Here we will keep our study of Hebrews focused on the principle of how God uses the wilderness to expose unbelief and establish true belief: “But Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end” (Hebrews 3:6). F.F. Bruce explains that in the third chapter of Hebrews we have the strongest affirmation in the New Testament of the principle *that continuance in faith is the test of the reality of*

*faith.*³⁸⁶ For clarification, we are not saying that we are saved by being steadfast and firm in our faith, but rather that our courage, perseverance, and hope *reveal that our faith is real.*

In the parable of the soils, Jesus also communicates this principle. In referring to the seed that fell on the rocky soil, He said,

Other *seed* fell on the rocky *ground* where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. ‘And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. (Mark 4:5-6)

Later when He was alone with the Twelve, He told them,

In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. (Mark 4:16-17)

In other words, the seeds on the rocky ground had a fair enough start, but in the heat of the sun, the plant (“because it had no root”) withered away. The writer of Hebrews has the same fear for his audience. Although they may have started out well in their journey of faith (like Israel had done before their wilderness experience), what really mattered was their *continuance* of faith. This is the test of reality. Paul had a similar concern for the church at Corinth and wrote: “Test yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; examine yourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Kenneth Bailey has taken a literary-cultural approach to the parables in Luke and draws out several parallel principles related to the Parable of the Sower discussed above. He asserts that the parable clearly teaches the listener about the nature and call of the

³⁸⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistle to the Hebrews; Revised:* 94

Gospel message, to “Hear the word of the kingdom and bear fruit.”³⁸⁷ He identifies four theological motifs within this parable which center on the call *to hear the word of God and bear fruit, i.e. the test of reality*:

1. The Kingdom is like a seed growing slowly; it is not an apocalyptic revolutionary disruption.
2. The parable speaks of grace. The sower sows liberally even in potentially unfruitful ground.
3. Fruit-bearing is an essential mark of the Kingdom.
4. The parable offers the listener hope. There is assurance of a harvest in spite of difficulties.³⁸⁸

To begin well is good, but that isn’t enough; it is only those who stay the course, bear fruit, and finish the race that have hope of gaining the prize.³⁸⁹

The writer of Hebrews makes his argument clear on this point in regard to why Israel was not allowed to enter the Promised Land: “So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:19). In Numbers chapter fourteen we find a source of the writer’s theology. When the Twelve Spies returned from their exploration of the land of Canaan, they described a land filled with milk and honey. Yet they also described a land filled with giants who were so large they could “squash them like grasshoppers.” Fear had gripped ten of the spies and the congregation became poisoned by their lack of belief. Even though Joshua, Caleb and Moses still believed in God’s promise, the Israelites cried out and threatened to stone them. Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst” (Numbers 14:11)? Moses

³⁸⁷ Bailey, 42-43.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.,43.

³⁸⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistle to the Hebrews; Revised*, 101.

asks the Lord to forgive them and spare them from His wrath, to which the Lord responds:

I have pardoned *them* according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. (Numbers 14:20-23)

The Israelites who had enjoyed God’s mercy in the Exodus, who had heard Him speak at Sinai, and who were guaranteed safe arrival in the Promised Land had spurned the LORD. The consequence would be that none of those of voting age would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Comparatively, the writer of Hebrews is speaking to an audience who had the benefit of a heritage of those who had experienced the power of God. They too had the promise of a homeland for which their faithful forefathers had longed:

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

The essence of would prevent his audience now from entering into this *heavenly Promised Land* was the same choice which hindered their wilderness-wandering forefathers from entering the earthly Promised Land of Canaan; *unbelief*.

In developing this principle of continuance as the test of reality in regard to belief, we now come to one of the most problematic passages in our theology of belief in the New Testament. Hebrews 6:4-6 reads:

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

F.F. Bruce provides a helpful distinction: “In these verses he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints.”³⁹⁰ The writer of the letter is speaking plainly about a reality which church history has also shown to be true:

Those who have shared the covenant privileges of the people of God, and then deliberately renounce them, are the most difficult persons of all to reclaim for the faith. It is indeed impossible to reclaim them, says our author. We know, of course, that nothing of this sort is ultimately impossible for the grace of God, but as a matter of human experience the reclamation of such people is, practically speaking, impossible.³⁹¹

This explanation parallels our analysis of the Parable of the Sower previously discussed. We see that sometimes people recognize the truth, and perhaps for a period desire to conform to it, but then, “for one reason or another, renounce it.”³⁹² In this passage, it is important to note the context, in that the writer of Hebrews is seeking to draw a parallel from Psalm 95’s description of the rebellion at *Meribah* to his contemporary situation. First he compares the Israelites who had “been enlightened” by seeing God’s power through a myriad of miracles (like the parting of the Red Sea, etc.), yet they still didn’t believe. The writer of Hebrews compares this reality to his current situation where some have experienced the sacrament of baptism and thus “been enlightened”. Secondly he speaks of those who have “tasted the heavenly gift” where he

³⁹⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistle to the Hebrews; Revised: 144.*

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

compares Israel's experience of God's provision of manna and quail in the desert to people(s) in his contemporary fellowship who had taken and enjoyed the benefits of communion. Third, he compares the Israelites who saw the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night in the desert (which was the presence of God's Spirit) to those, presumably in his fellowship or within the region, who had partaken of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands by elders in local churches.

Perhaps the most notable scriptural figure in the early apostolic literature that might fit who the writer is describing in this passage is the Simon Magus (Acts 8:9ff, 18ff). He:

1. Believed when heard gospel.
2. Was baptized.
3. Followed an evangelist.
4. Received the laying on of hands.

The Apostle Peter said Simon was still "in the gull of bitterness and in the bond of sin" (Acts 8:23). So the contemporary reader might ask, "In what way could this man have partaken of the Holy Spirit?" How had he "experienced the goodness of God's word and the powers of the age to come" and turned out to be so opposed to Jesus and His church? From the record we know that Simon Magus realized how good the Word of God was when he heard Philip preach – and he was amazed at signs and "powers" he saw when a man received the gospel (Acts 6:3). Yet ultimately as far as we know he did not submit himself to Christ, showing himself to be a disciple. Ultimately in our theology of belief we must accept the mystery of God's grace in that only He knows who will be saved (Matthew 7:22). Thus F.F. Bruce provides a helpful way for us to understand the

implications of this passage today: A credible profession of faith must be accepted as genuine, but ultimately it is only the Lord who knows who are His.³⁹³

In chapter eleven of Hebrews we see several typologies to which the author refers. These men and women of faith became icons of belief for the people of God: “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval” (Hebrews 11:1-2). And we learn that the only posture that pleases God is *exercised faith* among His people: “And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (v. 6). Thus it is not a surprise why God (in ancient times) and Jesus Christ (in a more contemporary context), continually provided wilderness experiences to test and establish faith to attribute glory to God.

If there were any other way to establish maturity in faith, we would certainly have some examples in Scripture. Instead we follow the author of Hebrews to the climax of his letter as he recounts a litany of men and women who were credited as righteous through acting in belief and faith: Abel provided a faithful sacrifice (v. 4). Enoch pleased God by faith (v. 5), Noah obediently built an ark in faith to save his family (v. 7), Abraham obeyed and left his home in order to become the father of those descendants whom would bless all the nations (11-16), by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (v. 20), by faith Joseph pleased God and spoke of the forthcoming exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (v. 22), by faith Moses “regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater value than the treasures of Egypt,” (v. 26) by faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea and

³⁹³ F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistle to the Hebrews; Revised*, 144.

fell the walls of Jericho (v. 29-30), and by faith the prostitute Rahab welcomed the spies in Jericho (v. 31).

In the final chapters of the letter of Hebrews, the writer concludes with the same principle established at the outset of the epistle: *continuing on the journey by faith is the test of reality... our continuance is assurance of our belonging to God: The Lord disciplines those He loves.* (Hebrews 12:1-3).

The Crux of the Matter is Grace

In developing a theology of belief as an aspect of this study, we inevitably must develop our understanding of the relationship between grace and action. In the book of Joshua we find a clarifying example that *the wilderness was a place where God reminded Joshua that Israel's inheritance was not given to them by merit, but by grace.* Joshua in his magnificent speech to Israel, before the land was divided and distributed as an inheritance to each tribe, reminded them of what the Lord had said: “I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant” (Joshua 24:13). In this climactic speech in the wilderness where Israel is finally given her promised inheritance, they are reminded their new *homeland is a gift, it has not been earned.*

We have found in leading wilderness adventures with young people, that this lesson of unearned grace is demonstrated beautifully on the trail. In the comfort of our daily routines we often take for granted the provision of the Lord, but in the wilderness, living in tents, eating basic food, drinking water rather than soda, etc., young people are better able to recognize how much they have been given. They learn that what they have

is theirs by grace, not because of merit. The wilderness can be a place to teach in an experiential and memorable way the important foundational truth that our *salvation* (not only the possessions we have been given) is by grace alone, and not by works.

Both James and Paul give us a Biblical view of grace and works. James teaches us: “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). He continues, “For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). Paul teaches,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

A brief discussion of the unity of these two statements is important for our study. Does Paul’s statement create conflict with James’ statement above? This question has been the source of much debate throughout church history. Terry McGonigal provides a helpful analysis of the *apparent* conflict and the *actual* unity of James’ and Paul’s statements. From careful reading and *exegesis* we can say that James and Paul have *different definitions of faith*.³⁹⁴ For James, “faith” as he refers to it, equals intellectual ascent alone; whereas “work” equals actions flowing from belief and trusting in God. James presents a balanced view in that if our faith is genuine, the fruit will be good works.³⁹⁵ *Our actions flow from our trust in God, and our actions are an indicator of reality.* This understanding is much like the lesson the writer of Hebrews is communicating to his audience—that continuance on the journey through obedience to God is the true test of reality in regard to the allegiance of our soul. This is why the

³⁹⁴ Terry McGonigal, "The Epistles of Paul; Understanding Grace Versus Works," Lecture delivered to Fuller Theological Seminary Extension, Colorado Springs, January, 1993, Fuller Theological Seminary, Colorado Springs, CO.

writer of Hebrews says that Israel was not able to cross over into the Promised Land due to their unbelief. James, speaking to a primarily Jewish audience as well has a similar view of how his listeners understand the word “belief.”

Paul on the other hand defines “faith” as being equal to “trust”, whereas “work” equals “legalism” i.e. earning salvation. For Paul, his understanding of “faith” and “belief” is complete trust in God.³⁹⁶ Because of his special calling to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, he was fighting an unceasing battle against legalism among his flock. There were many *Judaizers* among the churches so his language often asserted that the Law (or “works”) led to legalism which was a mockery of the cross; leading to death.³⁹⁷

Millard Erickson provides this clarification as well: “Good deeds done to others are represented as what follows from salvation, not as what we must do to receive it.”³⁹⁸ And commenting on the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1-16), Michael Knowles agrees: *The Kingdom of God is characterized by God’s gracious and generous character not on our reward for pious acts.*³⁹⁹

In our analysis, James and Paul’s languages do not conflict with one another, rather they are parallel. The main difference is their *audience* and their personal understanding and definition of the word “belief”. James was combating a false understanding of salvation via *belief as intellectual ascent without corresponding action*, and Paul was combating an understanding of salvation via *belief as equal to works or keeping to the Law*. James and Paul were correcting two different groups.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Specifically in the letter to the Galatians we see Paul’s confrontation of Peter, etc. about issues pertaining to the *Judaizers* influence among the church.

³⁹⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 1013.

Thus we can assert that God uses the wilderness as a place to establish true faith, and this faith is authenticated by spiritual fruit or “work”. So naturally as we lead young people in wilderness experiences a relevant question to ask along the journey would be, “According to the Scripture we have been reflecting on [whatever that may be that day on the trail] and the lessons you are personally learning from our time in the wilderness, what is an area of your life where you sense God calling you to *act* when you get home?” Or another relevant question with corporate application is, “What is something you feel our *group* needs to act on when we get home?” These questions bring together belief and action as they are meant to be—as one.

God Intentionally Tests His Disciples through Resistance to Establish Belief

In our thesis we argue that in order to introduce young people to Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith today, we need to be more intentional about taking young people on wilderness journeys in order to experience life-change through encountering God in His creation, community, and His Word. In making this assertion it is helpful in our theological framework to realize in Scripture there is clearly a precedent that *the wilderness is a place where God intentionally tests His disciples through various forms of resistance to establish relationship and belief*. We mentioned this briefly, earlier in the study, in reference to Jesus initiating resistance against His disciples to test their true belief by sending them into a storm after the feeding of the five thousand. Thus we affirm according to the Scriptures, that Jesus advocates the use of “resistance training” (Mark 6:45-5). We see in this passages that He crafted resistance (winds against them,

³⁹⁹ Knowles, 301.

etc.) to get results, i.e. life-change. As we disciple our groups of young people, it is important to think about how we too might craft challenging wilderness adventures. Often discussions are not enough to change one's heart; a challenge or outdoor adventure of some sort is often needed to reveal unbelief and to establish true belief.

In the Old Testament, there are many examples of God's personal initiative in resisting persons to produce life-change. Jacob's wrestling with God is one of the most vivid examples:

Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.²⁵ When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me. (Genesis 32:24-26)

His transformation is symbolized in the Lord giving Jacob a *new name*. The One who wrestled with Jacob all night said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).

Learning Obedience through Suffering

One indicator of authentic transformation is a willingness to come under the authority of the Heavenly Father. Again, because of our sinful nature this does not happen naturally. So we find that *the wilderness is a place where we learn obedience through suffering*. Throughout the Old Testament we see Israel grumbling because of suffering. Whether it be for a lack of food (Exodus 16:1-7, Exodus 16:8-21), lack of water (Exodus 15:22-27), or because of suffering under captivity, Israel learned obedience through suffering. The writer of Hebrews also reminds us that Jesus learned obedience through suffering: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their

salvation through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10). We too are instructed that God disciplines those He loves:

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:7-11)

Through the temptation of Christ in the desert (Luke 4:1-3), Jesus models for His disciples *a fortiori* that throughout the ages if He had to learn obedience through suffering. Common sense indicates that His disciples also will learn obedience through suffering. So Jesus *intentionally* used wilderness experiences with His disciples to teach them obedience through suffering (Luke 5:1-11).⁴⁰⁰ If the Holy Spirit apprenticed Jesus this way, to learn obedience through suffering, then it makes sense that Jesus would choose this mode of training with His apprentices. He intentionally took them on wilderness experiences to test and refine them. Athletes know this principle and apply it to their discipline regime to achieve excellence. Thus, we also in our discipleship strategy must find ways to test ourselves and others because we learn obedience most adequately through stress, suffering, and discipline.

Physical Transformation

The wilderness is also a place of *physical testing to produce transformation for God's glory*. This is a very broad topic in which we can not afford adequate space to

explore its complexities. But we will include in our study that the physical body has a part to play in the fulfilment of the spiritual life. And wilderness experiences are often remembered by the physical challenges they provide. Dallas Willard offers a summary of the relevance of this principle to our topic:

The physical human frame as created was designed for interaction with the spiritual realm and that this interaction can be resumed at the initiative of God. Then, through the disciplines for the spiritual life, that interaction can be developed by joint efforts of both God and the person alive in the dynamism of the Spirit.⁴⁰¹

We all have responsibility to take initiative in disciplining our bodies for God's glory, and for training our bodies in submission to God for His glory. Richard Foster calls the spiritual disciplines the "Door to Liberation" in that, "The purpose of the disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear."⁴⁰² Jesus modeled a commitment to the spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, worship, and celebration. And the early church carried on these and other corporate disciplines like confession and spiritual guidance.⁴⁰³ Wilderness encounters with God are a physical and spiritual experience. Through exercise, solitude, silence, prayer, etc. we feel invigorated and often experience a sense of joy in that we are using our bodies to bring glory to God. As an example, we are reminded of Mildred and Sylvio's comments about what they learned during a wilderness experience through the element of physical challenge:

⁴⁰⁰ Luke 5:1-11; Jesus tests Peter by telling him to put out again for a catch even though he was tired. Would he listen and obey? Yes—indicating authentic faith in his Master.

⁴⁰¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines; Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 77.

⁴⁰² Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), 2.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., These are a list of spiritual disciplines covered by Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline*.

Mildred explained how she was ‘absolutely loving being completely knackered at the end of the day’. Sylvio has a similar opinion: ‘you do feel better at the end of the day, when you walked back to your camp and you were tired—it does something’. These quotes demonstrate how the expedition would not have held the same meanings for the venturers if it had not been physically challenging.⁴⁰⁴

Testing to Expose Whether We Fear God or Man

We have looked at many forms of testing that the Lord has used in the wilderness. One final type of test we observe in our analysis of each wilderness experience recorded in Scripture reveals that the wilderness is a place where the Heavenly Father has tested His people to expose whether they feared God or man: After the return of the twelve spies, the people rose up in rebellion against Moses and revealed that their fear of the giants was greater than their fear of God (Numbers 13:1-33).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explored this topic in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. He paraphrases several passages of Scripture pertaining to the fear of God versus the fear of men:

Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-n-law. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take up his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.⁴⁰⁵

Then he urges men to fear God rather than fear man:

Men can do them no harm, for the power of men ceases with the death of the body. But they must overcome the fear of death with the fear of God. The danger lies not in the judgment of men, but in the judgment of God, not in the death of the body, but in the eternal destruction of body and soul. Those who are still afraid of men

⁴⁰⁴ Beames, 153.

⁴⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, 241.

have no fear of God, and those who have fear of God have ceased to be afraid of men.⁴⁰⁶

The congregation heard the testimony of the Twelve Spies in the wilderness and was confronted with the question, “Do we fear God or man?” They chose to fear men, and the consequence weighed heavily on their generation. Joshua and Caleb are models of those who choose to fear God rather than man. Joshua later became the proven leader of Israel, the one who would lead them into the Promised Land. We have observed that the wilderness, through physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual challenges, is a relevant place to ask young people to honestly evaluate whether they fear God or man in their daily lives. Looking at what we prioritize often reveals what we fear. We can help young people see (maybe for the first time) that the well-worn paths, or *patterns* in their life, actually signify who they fear.

Orientation, Disorientation, New Orientation, and Closure

Another principle we learn from the Scriptures in regard to the special role of wilderness experiences is that *the wilderness is a place of disorientation and new orientation in our relationship with God*. We also learn of the importance of closure in that it symbolically marks when specific journeys come to an end. God is interested in our transformation, and this does not happen on an “upward spiral toward heavenly bliss.”⁴⁰⁷ It happens through a process of orientation, disorientation, new orientation, and closure. Walter Brueggemann explores the first three aspects of this pattern in his book,

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Brennan Manning, "The Extravagant Love of the Father," Speech delivered to Young Life Leadership Retreat, September 5, 1991, Prescott Pines Camp, Prescott, AZ.

The Message of the Psalms. We all experience times of *orientation* where we are settled, comfortable, and content.

We also experience seasons of *disorientation* where we are confused, uncomfortable, unsure, and insecure. These are often times of transformation when God is sovereignly at work; disrupting our lives to deepen our trust in Him. Transformation does not usually begin with something new; rather it begins when something *old* in us begins to be *torn down*. The Apostle Paul said it this way to his friends in the church at Colossae:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.... Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.
(Colossians 3:1-5, 9-10)

Our times of disorientation are times of tearing down the old self—times of facing our old man and deciding to let him go. From an outdoor leadership perspective, Simon Beames agrees:

Being in a novel environment adds to participants' feelings of disequilibrium as they experience a heightened sense of arousal.... The learners entry into a contrasting environment is the first step towards reorganising the meaning and direction of his [sic] experience.⁴⁰⁸

The Psalmist also testifies to times of *new orientation*. These are times when one experiences transformation through letting go of his old man. This phase of growth

⁴⁰⁸ Beames, 147.

marks a new season to willingly denying oneself—picking up his cross and deciding to follow Jesus anew.

Closure is an important aspect of this rhythm of spiritual growth. As a person gains new orientation with God, there is a need to bring the experience to some sort of finish-line. In the spiritual life, this involves personal conviction or group consensus regarding the urgency of an obedient response to the action or direction gained from this position of new orientation. If a time of closure following a poignant experience does not happen, one can easily begin to doubt or question whether the transformation which has been experienced really occurred. Mankind matures and grows through this rhythm.

The Great Commission was a closure-event for the Disciples, and Jesus' ascension was the culmination of that closure-event marking the decisive point that the Disciples were now being sent out to act on the commission they had been given. Interestingly, the “doubting” episode (where some worshipped and others doubted) Matthew mentions preceding Jesus' commissioning words to the Disciples, indicates the tendency we all have to doubt the validity of the new orientation which occurs following a life-changing experience. And it is within Satan's scheme to always discredit the Word of God which is one of his primary modes of attack. We see this clearly modeled in the Temptation of Christ where all of his temptations sought to discredit the Word of God. He desires to derailing necessary closure-events in order to fan into flame any smoldering doubt.

The parable of the Two Builders provides another apologetic for our concept of *closure*; asserting the critical nature of *immediate application*. The parable, occurs at the conclusion of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and at the end of Luke's Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49)—thus pressing the urgency of an obedient and practical response to

Jesus' preaching.⁴⁰⁹ This is relevant for us in that at the end of a wilderness trip, it is urgent that we press young people on the urgency of responding to what Jesus has spoken to them. What Jesus speaks to us doesn't change, so it is urgent that we respond immediately to what He speaks to us. As we help young people process what has occurred in their lives and what they have heard Jesus speak to them through His Word and prayer, we need to help them consider how to abide daily in their life back in the city. Most likely very little has changed in their home context, so it is all the more urgent for us to help young people make a plan for mission-commitment and spiritual growth as they return.

Regarding this principle, we have found Psalm 1 particularly helpful in its poetic and its practical sense. In this Psalm, David teaches 1) to be careful about the foundation on which one builds his life, and 2) to be careful about one's relationships and priorities; i.e. to whom are we listening and who we are allowing to influence us? It is vital for young people today to consider if they are building their life (structure, patterns) on a human foundation to fit in, to impress others, or to get ahead, etc. We must encourage them to be aware that the fate of this structure (i.e. their self-oriented priorities) is going to crumble at some point because of the foundation it is built upon. Equally we are to be careful about our relationships because they are the foundation of our lives. Our relationship with Jesus Christ needs to be the central relationship in our life—out of which all other relationships will find their meaning and vitality.

Wilderness experiences with young people inevitably follow this process. At the beginning of the journey they experience a time of "orientation." Yet the moment they

⁴⁰⁹ Knowles, 287.

arrive at the base camp or trailhead and begin to prepare their back pack or sea kayak for the journey (which is an unfamiliar task to most); they enter a time of *disorientation*. This lasts through most of the trip. Then by the end of the trip, young people are encouraged to begin talking about “going home,” which helps them enter a time of *new orientation*, i.e. identifying how they have been changed during the trip, and how they want to be different in their lives when they return home.

The element of adequate closure is perhaps the greatest challenge for an outdoor leader. Preparing a young person to go home to the city after experiencing a “peak experience” is especially difficult, because we often find that lessons learned in the pristine environment of the wilderness may be lost as their parallel is difficult to relate in the context of a busy, violent, impersonal city-environment. Arnold Berleant has explored this quandary and discovered the value of *viewing the city as a type of wilderness*. As we reflect on the organic nature of the city, we are able to uncover many facets of the city environment which are analogous to a wilderness experience. For example:

One can find a parallel between the momentary respite from immersion in the density of a city or wilderness either by the panoramic view from the observation deck of a skyscraper or a broad boulevard, or by the sweeping panorama one might obtain from a mountain top, bluff, or tall tree. The aroma emanating from a bakery or restaurant might remind one of the odors of different vegetation or ground surfaces, such as pine needles or wet soil. The odor of decaying leaves or the effluvium of a marsh or swamp in the hot sun may resemble the smell of garbage containers on the sidewalk awaiting pickup or the exhaust of motor vehicles. Moving among buildings and along streets has some of the perceptual quality of moving among stands of trees and through openings in the vegetation. The background hum of traffic is reminiscent of the wind rushing through the trees when a front was coming through. Pushing one’s way through a crowd resembles the experience of pressing through dense growth. Constant concern over making a misstep influences our passage through both city and wilderness, while the background apprehension of danger from motor vehicles and muggers

parallels the constant threat, real or imagined, from the deadly creatures thought to inhabit a wilderness.⁴¹⁰

In shepherding young people, outdoor leaders need to consider hermeneutically the application of what young people have learned, and its relevant application to their home-context. This is the essence of good shepherd-leadership.

III. Sending and Sustaining in Missions: The Wilderness is a Special Place for Leadership Training

The final umbrella principle in building our theology of wilderness journey is that *the wilderness is a special place for leadership training*. Beginning with the wilderness experience of Israel after the Exodus, Jethro counseled Moses in the art of delegation (Exodus 18:17-27). Leading the community of God required delegation, training, and oversight. Another leadership principle is modeled later when Joshua is directed by God to have the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan River. As the people of Israel passed by the priests in the middle of the river, they learned an important principle of servant-leadership: *shepherds leaders are servants*. The priests demonstrated a ministry of muddy feet, sore shoulders, and faith as they stood in the middle of the Jordan. And this priestly calling remains the same today for the children of God.

God Identifies and Sets Apart Leaders in the Wilderness

Another vital part of leadership training is identifying leaders. The wilderness is a *special place where God identifies and sets apart leaders*. We will identify three

⁴¹⁰ Arnold Berleant, "The Wilderness City: An Essay on Metaphorical Experience," A. Haapala, ed., *The City as Cultural Metaphor: Studies in Urban Aesthetics* (Lahti, Finland: International Institute for Applied Aesthetics, 1998): 31.

instructive passages illustrating this principle. When the Twelve Spies returned from spying out the land of Canaan, Joshua and Caleb were set apart as the *true* leaders. They stood out among the others as authentic leaders who were willing to follow God and trust His Word (Numbers 13:1-33). Wilderness experiences often cause true leaders to stand out as they rise to the occasion where leadership is needed. For the attentive guide, the elements of weather and other unpredictable forces of nature provide a *real time observation theater* to watch leadership develop among young people in the group. Each young person will gravitate towards a specific role in the group. *It is very common for leaders to rise up instantly in times of stress or crisis.*

According to the Scriptures, leaders are often identified through wilderness experiences (Joshua 3:7, 4:14). The account of Moses appointing Joshua to lead Israel into the Promised Land is another example of how the Lord sets apart leaders in the wilderness. Our third example is the Apostle Paul. In Acts 27, we encounter Paul on a ship full of prisoners in the midst of a raging storm. Through the terror of the shipwreck, Paul's God-given leadership abilities stand out, and he is identified among the passengers as a leader who knew the true God.⁴¹¹

Commissioned to Engage in Missions

The wilderness is also a *special place where God commissions His followers to engage in missions*. When Elijah met God in the cave after the Mount Carmel miracle, God blessed him for the purpose of being sent out on a mission to preach a message of repentance to the lost (1 Kings 19:1-21). We also see again in Matthew 28:16-20, from

atop a mountain outside of Jerusalem, an illustration of this commissioning principle:

The disciples are commissioned to engage the people in the cities and villages with authority and assurance of companionship with the Spirit of Jesus in all of their labor (Matthew 28:16-20).

Concerning a range of other Biblical commissioning accounts, Robert Morosco provides a few helpful illustrations. Referring to several Biblical commissioning stories like Moses, the commissioning of the Twelve (Mark 6:7-13), the sending of the Seventy Two (Luke 10:1-12), the original call of the Twelve (Mark 3:13-19a), the general instruction to the disciples (Luke 12:1-12), and Jesus' Eschatalogical Discourse (Mark 13:9-13), Morosco writes:

Because of the form-critical work of Habel, Kuntz, Baltzer, and Hubbard, the Biblical Commissioning Story is regularly seen as containing the following six or seven elements: (1) an *introduction* that provides a specific setting for the divine commissioning, (2) a *confrontation* whereby the sender and messenger are brought face to face, (3) the *commission* itself, in which the sender sets forth some specific task and/or message for the messenger, (4) an *objection* to the mission raised by the prospective messenger, (5) a *reassurance* given by the sender to the messenger, and (6) a *conclusion* to the episode that tells of the messenger's fulfillment of or intention to fulfill the commission. A seventh element that is sometimes present with or near the objection is a formulaic statement by the sender of the difficulty the messenger will encounter on the mission.⁴¹²

Each commissioning account involves an element of sending out in the *Missio Dei*.

⁴¹¹ Acts 27: 33-37, Paul broke bread and told the people on the ship to eat; that not a hair on their heads would be harmed. Acts 28:6; after shaking the viper off of his hand, the islanders acknowledged his special leadership abilities, and thinking he was a god, they brought him many people for healing.

Character and Skill Development

In terms of leadership training, the wilderness is a place for character and skill development for missions. We see this in the life of David particularly (1 Samuel 17). Through his life we learn that *courage* is instilled by 1) *confidence in God, and 2) confidence in one's skill*. David confidently told Saul before standing up to Goliath that, this battle was the Lord's. In addition to the confidence that came from his worship of God, his shepherding skills were also clearly a source of confidence for the young David, i.e. his ability to kill lions and bears with his bare hands and his ability to use the stone and sling with fierce effectiveness.

Esther is another model of courage and confidence in God. After having decided that she must find a way to intercede on behalf of her people, she sent these words to Mordecai:

Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him. (Esther 4:15-17)

Today the Jewish *Feast of Purim* continues to celebrate with great enthusiasm Esther's courageous leadership.⁴¹³ The festival serves as a constant reminder of Esther and Mordecai's example, that leadership requires confidence in God, skill, and creativity. In the spirit of courage and confidence modeled by Esther, we need to prayerfully find ways to encourage and commission more women into the challenging youth mission fields of our world today.

⁴¹² Morosco, 543.

⁴¹³ Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 901.

Jonah was another man of God whose character was shaped in the wilderness. Three days in the belly of the whale certainly changed his perspective on unconditional obedience; regardless of how he felt about the Ninevites. God had exposed Jonah's double standards; he was selfish—concerned for a plant which ceased to provide him shade in the desert, yet had no concern or compassion for the thousands of lost Ninevites whom God was calling to repent. From this we learn that *God uses the wilderness to exposes one's double standards.*

As God shapes our character, we too struggle with double standards. For example, we might have fastidious taste in food—being irritated when something we want is not available. Yet we often disregard our role in providing for the basic necessities for the poor in our city. Or we might desire superior intellect to climb the proverbial ladder in our career, yet we ignore opportunities to help provide education for the poor of our society; thus overlooking opportunities to increase the potential of the poor—helping them to progress in developing their gifts and talents. Or we might often experience boredom, so we turn on the television for passive entertainment. Yet we neglect opportunities to encourage and bring life to the lonely, or elderly of our community. The wilderness exposes one's self-absorption. It transforms our thinking, giving us the occasion to purify our heart so that we can be more like yeast and salt in our sphere of influence.

Perhaps one of man's most common social defaults (to which leaders are also vulnerable) is to harbor anger or hatred of one's enemies. This attitude is like poison to a leader and must be rejected in order to effectively shepherd God's flock (1 Peter 5). Oscar Seitz, in his article "Love Your Enemies, the Historical Setting of Matthew 5:43ff, Luke 6:27ff," asserts that this inclination due to our fallen nature is one which the Master

Gardener will prune in the life of the leader in order to shape him or her to be a grace-full leader. He writes:

.... During the course of human history the identity of those whom men call their 'enemies' may change again and again, but the teaching of Jesus remains the same and continues applicable.... In the end, doing passes into being, conduct becomes character: 'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful' (Luke vi. 36).⁴¹⁴

It is no surprise that from a wilderness setting on the mountain (during the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus taught about loving one's enemies. Character transformation was, and still is Jesus' aim.

In terms of outdoor leadership it is often helpful in leading young people, to provide reward systems to encourage character development.

In urban life this relationship between rewards and effort may be more complex and, in some instances, disheartening. Take the example of a student who spends hours studying hard but still receives low grades; the student is not rewarded for his/her hard work. On a school-building project in Africa, the relationship between effort and rewards is clearer. If participants work hard at using a shovel and wheelbarrow to move earth at a building site, their objective will be reached sooner.⁴¹⁵

For example, in the midst of wilderness experiences, outdoor leaders will often have an opportunity to help young people who may not naturally relate with one another, to learn to get along.⁴¹⁶ This is a type of character development. Simon Beames notes progress in this character trait among one of his wilderness participants:

Rufus felt that' living in a tight community where there's no escape' was an important aspect of the experience. He explained to me that unlike the UK, where 'if you don't like someone you can just walk away or not phone them again or

⁴¹⁴ Seitz, 39-54.

⁴¹⁵ Beames, 148.

⁴¹⁶ There is ample evidence that several of Jesus' Disciples may not have naturally chosen one another as a close friend (for example Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector). A.B. Bruce's *The Training of the Twelve* is a helpful resource for further commentary about the group dynamics of the Disciples.

stay out of their way', the circumstances of the physical setting demanded that people get along with each other. Rufus expanded on this point by saying, 'you have to get along with people, you have to compromise, you have to resolve conflicts.⁴¹⁷

Rufus' discovery has profound theological significance. Whether our character transformation is internal or external (by choice, necessity, or against our will), there is *effort* involved in forming godly character. And there is also inherent reward. When we submit to character/spiritual formation for the glory of God, we will experience rewards in the realm of our physical health, our relationships with God and others, and in our emotional state of being.

In perhaps one of the most exhaustive studies of the leading outdoor education organizations in the United States, Stephen Kellert recorded the sentiments of many participants involved in a variety of outdoor experiences. His research affirms that wilderness adventures are inherently predisposed to character development and personal reward for young people. One participant shared: "The strength of the friendships and bonds that my group created were life changing. This strength was inextricably linked to the difficulty and nature of the work we were doing, and to the fact that we were living outdoors."⁴¹⁸ And another participant noted:

Getting us out into the real world, showing us what exists outside of TV, neon lights, suburbs, cement, and noise. Creating a genuine sense of community where each person is important for the survival of the whole—cooperation to exist, finding value in self and others, loving what is finally revealed—hacking labor, laughter in the valleys and baths in glacier waters.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Beames, 150.

⁴¹⁸ Stephen R Kellert, *A National Study of Outdoor Wilderness Experience*. School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, 1998: 29.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 30.

Although young people today have many wonderful qualities and abilities, perhaps one of the more deficient skills among young people today is the ability to make decisions. Whether this is due to a lack of confidence or deficient modeling due to passive parenting, if we are to develop more young leaders today to engage the complex mission fields of our ever-increasingly urban world, we must find ways to build confidence and develop proactive decision-making skills among young people. Decision making is a core competency in outdoor leadership. A leader needs to be able to identify the task at hand, and act with knowledge and expertise relevant to that task.⁴²⁰ Carlston reminds us of a relevant proverb from Virgil's *Aenid*: "It is too late to call a council when the enemy is seated at the gates."⁴²¹ In relating this proverb to the skill of decision-making in the outdoors, he writes, "... a stress on prudential wisdom by no means excludes an emphasis on bold action, while the notion that action must be undertaken before it is too late is very widely understood."⁴²²

Naturalistic settings provide additional complexity, which make the decision-making process more challenging.⁴²³ Yet for this reason it is the ideal training environment for developing catalytic-type leaders who can have broad influence in the city where proactive and visionary decision making is desperately needed.

In considering our task to train leaders, it is important to recognize several key distinctions between advanced and novice leaders. In one study of outdoor leaders it was discovered that expert leaders analyzed information differently than beginners, and were thus usually better at making good decisions:

⁴²⁰ Galloway, 19.

⁴²¹ Carlston, 103. Quoting Virgil's *Aenid*, XI.303

⁴²² Ibid., 103.

Experts were able to ‘chunk’ information and discern patterns and configurations of pieces, while novices see individual pieces. Chunking allows experts to see more complex response patterns and choose the best strategy; thus, they access more organized information than novices and make better decisions faster.⁴²⁴

Leadership skill development is most certainly a process—especially for beginners. A study of a novice-oriented Wilderness Education Association Stewardship Course was conducted to determine what change, if any, the course had on leadership development. Within the limits of the study, the findings suggested growth in leadership ability in the following ways: (1) Fundamentals of leadership, (2) Speech communication skills, (3) Character-building skills, and (4) Group dynamic skills.⁴²⁵ The ability to process environmental conditions and group needs varies from person to person, but in most cases it consists of three kinds of knowledge: 1) Knowing what to do, 2) Knowing how to do something, and 3) Knowing when and why to do something.⁴²⁶

So how then do we practically train leaders to mature in their decision-making ability? Galloway, reporting the results of a study conducted with outdoor leadership experts, suggests that judgment and decision-making ability may be developed in the outdoors via the following methods:

1. Experience in a variety of environments and seasons with varying conditions of intensity.
2. Realistic opportunities for students to lead peers in stressed and non-stressed situations.
3. Experience with participants with varying abilities and disabilities.
4. Leader explanation and discussion with students and/or practitioners about their own decision-making process in actual field experience.

⁴²³ Ibid., 20.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 20-21.

⁴²⁵ Spencer Hobbs, *National Conference Proceedings*. Bloomington, IN: Western Kentucky University, Perceived Change in Leadership Skills as a Result of the Wilderness Education Association Wilderness Stewardship Course, 2002. U.S. Department of Education: 2.

⁴²⁶ Galloway, 21.

5. Experience under a variety of leaders who serve as role models and mentors and.
6. Opportunities for processing student-led experiences with the emphasis on the discussion of the student leaders and their own decision making process with peers and leaders.⁴²⁷

The following table illustrates another example of the implications for decision-making in the wilderness environment, and their subsequent value for leadership development.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 24-25.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 25.

A Naturalistic Training Model**Table I**

Training Implications for Decision-Making in Naturalistic Settings

Task Features	Desirable Training Practices
Train for ill-Structured Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide repetition for situation assessment in a variety of situations - Use simulation to train on decision making - Provide timely, informative feedback - Train decision-making along with other tasks in a meaningful context
Train for a Heavy Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use “scaffolding” to reduce workload in early stages of training - Use “dual-task” training early - Train for automaticity (constant mapping) - Model/train experts’ strategies for minimizing workload - Train staff to monitor workload
Train for time Stress and high Stakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide some training under speed stress - Provide practice/feedback on speed/accuracy trade-offs - Train with simulated stressful situations - Require overlearning of emergency procedures
Multiple Players/ Organizational norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train procedures for monitoring, agenda setting, and communicating - Provide training/feedback on teamwork behavior - Involve staff in design and delivery of training - Informal contact between novice/expert staff

(Adapted from Means, Salas, Crandall & Jacobs, 1993)

Figure 7 A Naturalistic Training Model: Training Implications for Decision-Making in Naturalistic Settings

Evangelists are Identified and Trained in the Wilderness

In terms of leadership training, *the wilderness is also a special place where God trains leaders to be evangelists*. Elijah was nurtured and exhorted as an evangelist to his culture after a cave-encounter with God in the wilderness of Damascus. The shepherds tending their flocks in the wilderness near Bethlehem were transformed as they adored the infant Jesus; and they immediately went out proclaiming the good news in the towns

and countryside. Paul, after the Lord's rebuke on the road to Damascus, went into the Arabian Desert for a number of years. Then he emerges in the book of Acts as a radical evangelist! Philip too, was called, developed, and transformed as an evangelist through journeying with Jesus in the wilderness.⁴²⁹ And John the Baptist was called into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to prepare the way for the Lord; fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah 40:3, and Malachi 3:1. John the Baptist served as an evangelist, calling people to repentance—pointing them to follow Jesus of Nazareth rather himself. As we consider the need for developing young leaders to engage the youth mission fields of our cities today, we must give sincere attention to emerging leaders who have a gift in evangelism. According to the Scriptures, an ideal way to develop maturity and perspective within leaders (for their vital role in the city), is through wilderness experiences.

Pack Light for Maximum Effectiveness in Building the Kingdom: Incarnating the Gospel Cross-Culturally Requires a Biblical Attitude Toward Possessions

The wilderness has been a place where God prepares His disciples to pack light for maximum effectiveness in building the Kingdom. There are many examples of this in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, David, Joshua, etc. We also see Jesus instilling this principle in the Disciples as He commissioned them on their first evangelistic journey:

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: 'Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for *your* journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave

⁴²⁹ In the wilderness, Jesus questioned Philip at the feeding of the 5,000. Later, experiencing the Great Persecution of the church in Jerusalem, Philip set out as an evangelist to Samaria.

that city. As you enter the house, give it your greeting. If the house is worthy, give it your *blessing of peace*. But if it is not worthy, take back your *blessing of peace*. (Matthew 10:5-13)

A highlight for the author in leading wilderness adventures has been to observe young people discovering this principle of “packing light”. In our experiences on the trail with young people, it is remarkable how much they enjoy the experience yet with so few material belongings. In the wilderness we are more naturally able to comprehend the truth that we need very few material possessions to enjoy a full life. In other words, they learn the age-old proverb: “You can’t strip a naked man.”⁴³⁰ Or in the words of Jesus, “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of one’s possessions (Luke 12:15).”

To a young person, these experiences are often the beginning of a deeper understanding of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls the “work” of discipleship. In his description of the Twelve he writes:

They are not to go about like beggars and call attention to themselves, nor are they to burden other people like parasites. They are to go forth in the battle-dress of poverty, taking as little with them as a traveler who knows he will get board and lodging with friends at the end of the day. This shall be an expression of their faith, not in men, but in their heavenly Father who sent them and will care for them. It is this that will make their gospel credible....⁴³¹

This is the description of the kind of young leaders we need for missions today. Wilderness ministry programs where leadership training and commissioning to missions takes place will prove to develop and multiply leaders with the *David-like*, *Esther-like*, and *Daniel-like* character, skill and courage needed to engage the young, in today’s world of poverty, religions, violence, and clashing civilizations. Geffrey Kelly, commenting on Bonhoeffer’s Christocentric spirituality agrees:

⁴³⁰ Carlston: 90. Quoting Plautus (M.-J. Lagrange, *L’Evangile selon Saint Matthieu* (8th ed.; Paris: Lecoffre, J. Gabalda et Cie, 1948) 259; Plautus, *The Comedy of Asses*, 92 (where the statement is apparently proverbial).

The only faith which liberates is that inspirited by love and shaped in service. Anxiety over security, survival, and even self-respect was hardly a mark of the freedom of Christ, who could move so openly with sinners and compassionately touch the leper....⁴³²

Bonhoeffer's Christocentric spirituality is a model of what it means to "pack light." He describes what "packing light" looks like as a disciple descends into the valley today; in the midst of the political struggles, systematic oppression, and injustice of the city.

Having an attitude and practice of packing light in our every day lives, opens the way to a life of freedom—free from entitlement and free to engage the world.

Bonhoeffer believed that Christians were free *for* the world, not *from* the world: He, "Believed so intensely in Jesus Christ whom he described as the center of his person and, indeed, of all history, that, as his life became more involved in the ecclesiastical and political strife, he felt progressively freer to question many of his former beliefs because they seemed so un-Christlike in their focus."⁴³³

⁴³¹ Bonhoeffer, 231.

⁴³² Geoffrey B. Kelly, "Freedom and Discipline: Rhythms of Christocentric Spirituality." In *Ethical Responsibility*. New York: Edwin Mellen Pr, 1981: 310.

⁴³³ Ibid., 307-309.

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT DESIGN

A Brief Survey of Various Outdoor Leadership and Wilderness Experience Programs

In preparation for our project design, we have conducted a brief survey of several outdoor programs which have similar qualities to the international program we aim design for implementation. Although there are many organizations doing outdoor ministry, we have found that *Young Life*, *Outward Bound*, and *National Outdoor Leadership School* have elements which we desire to imitate in our ministry. We will also provide a brief description of a ministry in Japan called *Northstar* which is in the early stages of development but has a similar vision for developing outdoor adventure ministry in Asia.⁴³⁴

David Cowles provides an historical perspective on the evolution of Young Life's wilderness ministry.

Young Life's first wilderness program, *LaVida*, began in 1970. It was designed to take inner-city youth into the Adirondack Mountains to learn to think and act in ways that were socially responsible and congruent with Christ's Gospel.... Parroting the successful High Roads venture that Wheaton College started with Outward Bound, a decade earlier, Christian camps from Florida to Alaska developed 'stress' programs. Marathon runs, dawn-to-dusk days of hiking, and 'solos' became well-used tools to teach kids how to deal with difficult situations in their lives and increase their faith.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ The author has been involved with the development of Northstar from its inception in 2002.

⁴³⁵ David Cowles, "Wilderness Camping Comes of Age; The Medium That Has Taught Generations How to Survive Has Itself Survived." *Journal of Christian Camping* (September/October 1995): 7.

Although interest in outdoor experiences was at a peak in the 1970's, interest began to decline in the 1980's. Skeet Tingle, former director of Young Life's Wilderness Ranch, provides insight into a reason for this change: "Wilderness camping could no longer be embraced by the mainstream because it was not entertaining, and, therefore, it was not worth the money."⁴³⁶

As Cowles mentioned in his article about Young Life wilderness camping, another organization that has a similar focus towards providing transformational experiences for young people in the outdoors is Outward Bound. Their mission is to:

...inspire character development and self-discovery in people of all ages and walks of life through challenge and adventure, and to impel them to achieve more than they ever thought possible, to show compassion for others and to actively engage in creating a better world.⁴³⁷

Outward Bound was founded to provide young sailors during World War II with experience and skill to survive at sea.⁴³⁸ The organization began in Wales through the efforts of German educator Kurt Hahn, and later established itself in North America in the 1950's.

The emphasis of Outward Bound has always been experiential learning through challenge and discovery in the outdoors. They have developed their programs on the foundation of the following core values: 1) Adventure and Challenge, 2) Learning by Doing, 3) Compassion and Service, 4) Social and Environmental Responsibility, 5) Character Development, and 6) Inclusion and Diversity.⁴³⁹ Their main areas of expertise

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴³⁷ "Outward Bound Main Page," <http://www.outwardbound.org/> (accessed July 17, 2006).

⁴³⁸ Editor, "Outward Bound Wilderness Expedition History," 2006, <http://www.outwardboundwilderness.org/history.html>. (accessed July 17, 2006).

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

in the outdoors are in backpacking, canoeing, canyoneering, dogsledding, mountaineering, rafting, rock climbing, sailing, sea kayaking, and snow and ice travel.

James Neill and Katica Dias recently conducted a study of an Outward Bound experience involving Australian young people to investigate the enhanceability of resilience in young people via a challenging adventure education programs. They refer to experiential expeditions as “Resilience-enhancing challenges” (this is essentially secular terminology for “character development”).⁴⁴⁰ Neill and Dias assert that resilience-enhancing challenges used to be more common in pre-industrial society when more young people worked outdoors in agricultural fields, etc. As we learn from history, we may assert that any training experience, in order to be transforming, will involve challenge and support; resulting in resilience.⁴⁴¹ We find a similar analogy in nature in that as a gardener cuts and prunes (challenge) a plant and then applies a salve or fertilizer (support) to help the plant grow from the pruning experience, the result is healing and new growth; enhancing the fruit-bearing capacity. In spiritual terms, we argue that the result of “resilience-enhancing challenges” is a fuller ability to enjoy God—being wholly satisfied in Him. Neill and Dias summarize their findings with this encouraging data:

This study provides encouraging empirical support for the philosophy of stress-inoculation training as implemented in an Outward Bound program. The cutting edge of challenge, it seems, can and does make people stronger, particularly when the salve of social support is applied.⁴⁴²

Similar to Outward Bound, The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) founder Paul Petzoldt had a similar concept of character development through equipping young people with skills for leadership in the outdoors. His vision was to take people

⁴⁴⁰ Neill and Dias, 36.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

into the wilderness for extended periods of time, teach them the essential skills they needed for survival and by doing so, form skilled leaders. He believed that it was through extended expeditions (two to twelve weeks) where a person could practice skills over and over, that leaders would be sufficiently developed.⁴⁴³ NOLS' main areas of expertise are in backpacking, canoeing, caving, climbing, fly fishing, horse packing, mountaineering, rafting, river travel, river kayaking, sailing, sea kayaking, skiing, snow boarding, and wilderness medicine.

Stephen Kellert conducted an extensive study evaluating NOLS, Outward Bound and the Student Conservation Association to achieve a better understanding of the impact of the outdoor wilderness experience.⁴⁴⁴ He provides the following summary:

One of the most striking results of the retrospective study was the perceived overall impact of the outdoor experience.... 72% of participants viewed the experience as 'one of the best' in their life... 78% of the participants believed their program experience had exerted a major influence on their life.⁴⁴⁵

In comparison to our three North American examples listed above, from an Asian context, one of the more visionary organizations that is working to develop outdoor ministry among young people in Japan is called *Northstar*. The core values of their organization are "outdoor adventure with an international focus." The Northstar lodge is located in Norikura Kogen, a mountain village in the Northern Japanese Alps. They seek to provide a unique experience balanced between intense adventure and peaceful reflection. They provide opportunities for backpacking, rock climbing, mountain-biking, and snowboarding. The author has spent a considerable amount of time helping

⁴⁴² Ibid., 41.

⁴⁴³ Editor, "Nols Main Page," 2006, <http://www.nols.edu/about/> (accessed July 17, 2006).

⁴⁴⁴ Kellert, 8.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

Northstar form their vision and strategy. We believe that Northstar is in a unique position to influence youth ministry in Japan as well as Asia through providing transforming experiences in the outdoors for the youth workers and the young people whom they serve.

One observation regarding the NOLS, Outward Bound, Young Life, and Northstar programs is that they all place significant emphasis on guide training and apprenticeship so that their guides/instructors are competent to lead trips effectively. Rick Curtis comments on this commonly shared practice in guide preparation: "... new leaders are paired with an apprentice, and there is a minimum level of competency required (leader training course, wilderness first aid course, safety management seminar, CPR, Group skills workshop)." ⁴⁴⁶ Thus, providing excellent guide training and outdoor leadership skills are our primary focus in accomplishing the goal of developing effective outdoor ministry throughout Asia and the Pacific.

Project Design: A Proposed 10 Day International Outdoor Leadership Training Course

Cross Cultural Considerations in Several Mission Contexts

Japanese Context

An interesting observation we have made in working with young people in the Japanese context is that they have a sincere interest in activities that are "Western." Northstar, near Nagano City, Japan has proven to be more successful in drawing young to

participate in their activities, as it has added international staff to their team. Roughly half of the staff members at Northstar are from North America, Europe, New Zealand and Australia, whereas the other half is predominantly bi-lingual Japanese. This has created an environment which interests Japanese young people. The opportunity to learn English and enjoy adventure activities which have a Western overtone (like rock climbing, and “extreme” sports) is very attractive to Japanese young people. Dan Junker and Yamaken Yamaguchi, the directors of Northstar have shared valuable wisdom in understanding the task of developing youth ministry in Japan. Yamaken, being a former youth pastor in Tokyo, affirms that adventure will play an important role in reaching Japanese young people and training youth workers in relational ministry.⁴⁴⁷ From Dan Junker’s perspective, there is a tendency in Japanese culture to avoid risk or adventure. Several common Japanese words and phrases which are deeply ingrained in Japanese culture will illustrate some of the cultural challenges we face in attempting to encourage more young people to engage in adventurous outdoor activities.

A common term in Japanese culture which inhibits an adventurous spirit is *gaman*. This means, “Toughen up and don’t complain.” This has an effect on Japanese young people causing them to be more fearful of taking risks that might push them out of their comfort zone. As we have discussed earlier in our thesis, risk must be coupled by acceptance in order to bear fruit: If a Japanese young person does not feel safe to experiment and fail, then they will avoid taking unnecessary risks. Another similar term is *tatemae*; which communicates that there is honor and dignity in duplicity or deceit. In

⁴⁴⁶ Rick Curtis, "Training College Wilderness Leaders." In *Annual International Conference of the Association for Experiential Education held in Austin, TX, November 3-6, 1994*: U.S. Department of Education Educational Resources Information Center, 1994: 251.

⁴⁴⁷ Yamaken Yamaguchi, interview by Ashley Denton, July 25, 2006, Azumi Village, Nagano, Japan.

other words, “Do not show who you really are or what you really think.” This allows young people to save face or protect their dignity, because it is a common experience among family or friends, if they were honest with how they felt or thought, to experience either a passive or harsh response, i.e. *giri* (which we will address in the next paragraph). Other common phrases which carry similar connotations and thus inhibit adventure are: *baka* (“Stupid”), *wakaranai* (“I don’t understand”), *abunai* (“Dangerous”), *doshiomonai* (“I can’t do anything about it”), *meiwaku*: (“I don’t want to be a bother”), and *hazukashii* (“I am embarrassed to do something”).⁴⁴⁸ All of these phrases, Junker says, create a feeling among Japanese young people that taking risks are emotionally too dangerous to attempt because failure is so shameful. So the result is many Japanese young people are emotionally tied in knots—desiring to release the impulses of their adolescence to try new things, take risks, and experience the excitement of adventure, yet afraid to take risks for fear of failure.

A profound opportunity we have in leading Japanese young people through outdoor adventures is to model the love of Christ which is antithetical to a common *burden* carried by many Japanese, called *giri*. This is a typical trait among Japanese which essentially means “to attach strings” to a gift or service. In other words, “If you do something for me, I will do something for you.” Or, “If you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” In Japanese culture, it is hard to receive something freely. According to Junker, Japanese feel they have to give something back. For example if someone says, “Do you want some cake? (translated from Japanese),” the typical Japanese response is to say “no” three times. They are thinking “yes I want the cake”, but they feel compelled to say “no”.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

In other words, Junker says, “There is almost no such thing as a genuine gift in Japanese culture.”⁴⁴⁹

This has severe implications in that God’s love is not based on *giri*. We can never repay Christ for what He has done for us; rather we respond to God out of being loved by Him. So the concept of servant leadership which is wonderfully modeled and illustrated by the outdoor guide during a wilderness journey is a difficult concept to understand among Japanese. Positively, the implications are significant when an experienced guide who is naturally respected as a “professional” in the field of outdoor leadership has a mannerism of servant hood, habitually serving young people with honor and respect. In the same way that Peter said to Jesus, “Go away from me I am a sinful man,” we can have a similar influence on young people by modelling servant leadership in a culture where elders are highly revered; where it would be inconceivable for an elder man or woman to *bow low* to serve one who is younger. Yet this is the gospel of grace—the undeserved gift of Jesus’ suffering on our behalf!

On another positive note, *giri* can be redeemed as a positive quality in evangelism in that because of the relational trust that is built through working together, when pastors and school teachers bring young people to a camp such as Northstar, they will naturally tell others as well—thus redeeming the “you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours” cultural quality. By providing high quality experiences, we may enjoy a reciprocal conduit to get the word out so that more young people will come to the various activities Northstar provides.

⁴⁴⁹ Dan Junker, interview by Ashley Denton, July 15, 2006, 2006, transcript, Azumi Village, Nagano, Japan.

Japanese missionary Kelly Malone, in his article, *Producing Reproducing Disciples in Japan*, agrees with the power that this kind of modelling has on Japanese young people. He writes: “People learn more by sight than by sound”⁴⁵⁰ This makes wilderness ministry all the more relevant as we seek to communicate the gospel through outdoor experiences which are full of visual stimuli. Malone writes:

In Japan, the best-selling books by far are *manga* comic books, which optimize the use of pictures and minimize the use of words. *Manga* versions of the New Testament are a hot item among young people—even those who are not Christians.... People who are visually stimulated are often verbally bored. And if we cannot hold their attention we cannot teach them to obey the commands of Christ.⁴⁵¹

As well, Malone has found that the small group approach to reaching young people is more effective than large group proclamation events. Again this strengthens our assertion that wilderness experiences in community with a small group of friends will have a lasting impact on young people in Japan: “Discipleship takes place best in small groups...there is unlimited potential for this kind of model for producing reproducing disciples to be replicated throughout Japan.”⁴⁵²

Indian Sub-Continent Context and Other Two-Thirds World Mission Contexts

Possibly the most complex cultural concern we must consider in our vision to provide an opportunity for every person to encounter Jesus Christ through guided outdoor experiences, is the issue of poverty. Here we have what appears to be a conflict in that our theology of journey is built on the principle of *Missio Dei* which includes all people. Yet most, if not all, wilderness or outdoor programs, due to the expense of equipment and

⁴⁵⁰ Kelly Malone, "Producing Reproducing Disciples in Japan," *Japan Harvest* 57, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 11.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 12.

transportation, usually serve young people whose parents have enough extra money to afford an adventurous experience. Parents of young people in poor societies cannot afford to pay for “experiences” for their young people when they often cannot even feed their families. Many of the world’s slums are deep in the heart of cities where it would take considerable effort and cost to provide transportation for a young person to leave the city for a short period of time to *enjoy* a wilderness experience. In the inequitable world we live in, sadly, enjoyment is not usually a priority among the poor as they are concerned more with survival.

These realities throw a serious proverbial wrench in our assertion that every young person deserves an opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ in the beauty and peacefulness of His creation. Yet, with every missionary dream there are always seemingly insurmountable obstacles. As we have considered this apparent conflict in our project design, we must re-assert that the wilderness has always been a special place for transformation throughout salvation history. And the city is a place in *need* of transformation. Thus our dream to give young people an opportunity to experience Jesus Christ through guided wilderness adventures can not be hindered by any obstacle, including poverty. We must find a way.

The problem of poverty has led us to the consideration of several other principles we must embrace in our project design: 1) God sides with the poor and so must we in developing our mission model to reach young people through outdoor ministry. 2) The gospel is translatable in every culture, and so our strategy to present the gospel and make disciples must be translatable in poor societies as well; thus we must pursue ways to provide young people the highest quality experience at the lowest possible cost. 3)

Equipment and transportation are our two greatest obstacles⁴⁵³ so we must adopt a strategy that utilizes already-available technology rather than introducing foreign technology, thus we must adopt a culturally sensitive strategy for equipment-use which we will term “*local tech.*” This means that the equipment we use during an adventure experience, to keep young people warm and dry, etc., must be made from materials that are local and commonly used by farmers, shepherds, or others who do outdoor work in the nearby wilderness environment. We must embrace “*local tech*” methods of ministry rather than using expensive high tech equipment which is foreign to the people we desire to serve. To address the issue of transportation, we will have to consider ways we can provide experiences for young people near cities by using public transportation, etc. to keep costs very low.

God Sides with the Poor

Why should reaching out to young people in the midst of situations of poverty be at the forefront of our agenda? Simply because God cares deeply about the plight of the poor.⁴⁵⁴ *Mary's Song*, recorded in the gospel of Luke also affirms this truth:

He has brought down rulers from their thrones
 But has lifted up the humble.
 He has filled the hungry with good things
 But has sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:52-53).

⁴⁵³ *Big City Mountaineers*. "What To Pack." www.bigcitymountaineers.org/youth_agencies/what_to_pack.htm. (accessed 11/18/2005). Big City Mountaineers has identified equipment as the single most critical deterrent to urban young people in Denver, Colorado being able to participate in an outdoor program. So they have developed partners with outdoor companies to provide free boots and other equipment to bring down the cost.

⁴⁵⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 75.

Nicolas Wolterstorff goes as far as saying that *God has taken sides with the poor*; He is not *on the side of the rich*.⁴⁵⁵ The following passages support this idea:

The LORD takes his place in court;
He rises to judge the people.
The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people:
'It is you who have ruined my vineyard;
the plunder from the poor is in your houses.
What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?'
declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty. (Isaiah 3:13-15)

Woe to those who make unjust laws,
To those who issue oppressive decrees,
To deprive the poor of their rights
And withhold justice from the oppressed of my people,
Making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.
What will you do on the day of reckoning,
When disaster comes from afar?
To whom will you run for help?
Where will you leave your riches? (Isaiah 10:1-2)

Elaine Storkey also explores "integral mission"⁴⁵⁶ in the ministry of Jesus. His encounter with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) provides an illustration. Zacchaeus was rich but had few friends. After being confronted by Jesus, he responded: "Half my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much (NRSV)." What brought about this response? "The very act of acceptance from Jesus put him under conviction and made him face his life, his past, his collusion with injustice, his disregard for the poor and his part in the whole corrupt system."⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁵⁶ "Integral mission" is the word commonly used to refer to holistic ministry, i.e. caring for the person as well as the soul.

⁴⁵⁷ Elaine Storkey, *Justice, Mercy and Humility; Integral Mission and the Poor*, ed. Tim Chester (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2002), 33.

This is an example of how the verbal message coupled with Jesus' reputation as a reformer of corrupt social structures evokes an authentic response from Zacchaeus. Jesus connects with his heart and confronts his sin. Who knows how Zacchaeus' repentance may have affected the fairness of tax-collecting in Jericho from that day forward—he presumably knew all of the tricks of the trade and had relationships with all of the perpetrators. We hear nothing more of Zacchaeus' ministry after his conversion, but for all we know he may have become an advocate for mistreated tax *payers*. Maybe he started "Tax Oppressors Anonymous." This is the type of transformation we expect to occur as we facilitate opportunities for more and more young people to experience Christ through wilderness adventures: Transformed young people have incredible potential to become leaders and advocates for justice in their broken societies.

In considering the challenge of pursuing transformation for the poor through outdoor experiences, it is our conviction that we must not allow obstacles to turn us away from our vision. Instead we must look for opportunities in this apparent conflict and pursue our vision with tenacity; following in the wake of a cloud of missionary witnesses who have gone before us. As we consider the obstacles, we may discover that the real conflict is not that this vision is too difficult to accomplish among the poor; rather the conflict is the staggering lack of accountability for personal wealth among Christians.⁴⁵⁸ We believe there are many Zacchaeus' (including the author) who Jesus has confronted on this heart issue of generosity toward the poor. The question is whether we will respond like Zacchaeus and experience liberation personally and corporately; or whether

⁴⁵⁸ Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 1997), 25. Sider exposes this idolatry: "The United Nations estimates that the richest 20 percent of the world's persons are at least 150 times richer than the poorest 20 percent. The net worth of the 358 billionaires on the planet listed by Forbes in 1994 was equal to the combined income of the bottom 45 percent of the world's population (2.35 billion people)."

we will remain in our sin and watch our neighbors perish. We must not give up hope for transformation of the city and we must not lose heart in finding ways to give every young person an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ and grow in his or her faith.

New Zealand and Australia Context

Given the geography and outdoor nature of Australians and New Zealanders, it is no surprise that outdoor education has become standard curriculum for 5th and 6th form boys and girls in the public schools.⁴⁵⁹ In New Zealand, the government has initiated an effort to make their nation the most active nation in the world. They have formed an organization called SPARC (Sports and Recreation New Zealand) to fund and support any effort (public or private) which promotes activity among young people. In an interview with Roger Wood, the funding manager for SPARC, the author asked, “What criteria do you have for granting funding to your applicants?” He said, “We don’t care who it is, or even what they are doing—if the proposal clearly indicates it will promote physical activity among young people, we will support it.”⁴⁶⁰ I asked further, “What if there were funding requests from religious organizations who wanted a grant to develop a wilderness ministry?” He replied, “If it is well planned and looks like it will work and get more young people active, we will support it. We do not care what group it is that is making the proposal, we just want to see more young people active, full stop.”⁴⁶¹ Part of the government’s motivation is to promote physical health so as to alleviate stress on the

⁴⁵⁹ Michael A. Boyes and David O’Hare, “Between Safety and Risk: A Model for Outdoor Adventure Decision Making.” *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 3, no. 1 (2003): 63. “Outdoor adventure pursuits are now a mandated component of the New Zealand health and physical education school curriculum.” Fifth and sixth form are equivalent to years 10 (sophomore) and 1 (junior) in North American schools.

⁴⁶⁰ Roger Wood, interview by Ashley Denton, September, 2004, transcript, Outdoors NZ Conference, Poly Tech Christchurch.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. Note: “Full Stop” means “Period” or “End of Sentence”.

social medical system. And it is also agreed that physical activity promotes learning among young people—so it is logical in this cultural context that this effort would be supported and funded by the government.

Within the cultural context and geography of New Zealand, there is immense potential for developing wilderness ministries. We have observed, though, that most outdoor activity is *education or tourist-oriented*. Only Scripture Union and a few other groups are conducting outdoor ‘ministry’ with young people. And most of the outdoor ministries we have observed, model an “instructor-student” relationship rather than a pastoral journey model like the one we are proposing.⁴⁶² Researchers have found in New Zealand that what motivates young people to participate in outdoor activities is an opportunity to enjoy a sense of freedom, to gain emotional support from caring adults, and to build a sense of self-confidence.⁴⁶³ We observe that outdoor education programs do seek to meet these needs, but fall short in that they lack spiritual content. As we have argued, young people are longing for satisfying relationships; yet without introducing young people to Jesus Christ, the most satisfying of all relationships, we are really only offering clouds without rain.⁴⁶⁴ It is our assertion that a new emphasis on the spiritual journey in outdoor education is vital for young people in New Zealand today. We argue that all of the effort and energy being poured into quality outdoor education (especially in

⁴⁶² Both Scripture Union (in Australia and New Zealand), and Adventure Specialties (in New Zealand) model some of the principles we are proposing. Scripture Union focuses more on ‘courses’ for Christian students and Adventure Specialties is a business which hires Christian guides. Most of Adventure Specialties’ trips are limited in spiritual content due to their clientele which is usually schools, etc. who are hiring them to provide a quality outdoor education experience.

⁴⁶³ Dorin Festeu, "Motivational Factors that Influence Students' Participation in Outdoor Activities." *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 2, no. 1 (2001): 45.

⁴⁶⁴ Jude provides a pointed rebuke to all false teachers (of whom, from our perspective, many exist in the field of secular outdoor education), across all cultures, who hold back from the sheep what is most desired and needed by the sheep: “These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—

Western societies) is largely a waste if it does not encourage creature(s) to give glory to the Creator in their pursuit of adventure.

Eastern Europe Context

Interestingly in Romania, those who promote outdoor adventure activities are not schools, youth clubs, or universities. Rather, they are young entrepreneurs who are sensitive to the fondness young people have for the outdoors and adventure. These entrepreneurs are beginning to capitalize on this opportunity. Doren Festeu writes, “More and more young people seem to be attracted by hiking, rock climbing, abseiling, canoeing, mountain-biking, orienteering, sailing, and caving.”⁴⁶⁵ In order to understand some of the cultural considerations in developing outdoor ministry in this region, Festeu summarizes five main themes Eastern European young people identified regarding their motivation to embark on an outdoor adventure. The following themes are ranked in order of importance:

1. Opportunity for enjoyment and fun.
2. Opportunity to meet new friends.
3. Opportunity to enjoy nature’s beauty.
4. Opportunity to escape from daily routine and family.
5. Opportunity to explore new territories.⁴⁶⁶

According to Richard Beckham, the Executive Assistant to the President of Greater Europe Mission, there is a great need for more outdoor adventure and camping ministries in Eastern Europe. He indicated through a personal interview that he is familiar with only one wilderness-oriented ministry in Croatia, and it has a relatively

twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.” (Jude 12-13).

⁴⁶⁵ Festeu, 44.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 52.

small impact. He agreed that the potential is significant, yet training and expertise will need to be provided in order to develop a sustainable indigenous leadership model for this type of ministry in Eastern Europe.⁴⁶⁷

Levels of Competency: Proposed Award and Certification Scheme

The goal of our project design is to *promote the development of outdoor leaders and programs world wide for the purpose of introducing young people to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith through guided wilderness adventures*. Our vision is that young people in every city will have an opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ and grow in his or her faith through outdoor adventure. And our specific mission is to introduce young people to Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith through guided wilderness adventures. In accomplishing this mission, our method is two fold: 1) Developing *outdoor leaders* who are humble in the heart and who excel in the skills of safely and effectively introducing young people to Jesus Christ in the outdoors, and 2) Initiating, developing, and evaluating Christ-centered, *outdoor ministry programs* worldwide that are committed to providing the highest quality outdoor experiences possible at the lowest possible cost.

In developing our project toward a ten day course to train outdoor leaders in the heart and skill of wilderness ministry, we have several enduring values which will guide the development of our ministry internationally:

1. Developing indigenous leaders.
2. Relational/incarnational approach.

⁴⁶⁷ Richard Beckham, interview by Ashley Denton, June 10, 2006, Greater Europe Mission.

3. As the world becomes more urbanized we are committed to a city strategy of lifting up the young and the poor of the city.
4. Provide trainees with excellent Biblical, theological, missiological, spiritual, and practical training with a special emphasis on evangelism, discipleship, youth, and outdoor ministry.
5. Developing technical outdoor leadership skills equivalent to international standards.
6. Providing young people the highest quality wilderness experiences at the lowest possible cost.
7. Ministry is most effective through a team approach.
8. International partnership and collaboration: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:3-6).
9. *Outdoor Leadership International Statement of Faith (Appendix II)*

In accomplishing our mission it has been necessary to develop a course which combines competencies in spiritual leadership as well as outdoor leadership skills. In developing a course we have separated the spiritual leadership aspect of our training into a course called *Wilderness Ministry Institute™* with the goal of creating a symbiotic relationship with an umbrella organization called *Outdoor Leadership International™*. We have taken this approach in an effort to protect some of our trainees who may be engaged in outdoor-leadership-as-mission in creative access countries. *Outdoor Leadership International™* will be focused on outdoor leadership skills, international standards, and associated competencies expected of a professional outdoor leader internationally. Thus, if an outdoor leader in a creative access country is asked for his or her credentials to take a group of high school young people on a wilderness adventure, they will be able to provide certification from *Outdoor Leadership International™*, which will be presented publicly as a general training institute in outdoor leadership. There will

be no mention of “missions” or other “spiritual” terms on the website or in other promotional literature. Wilderness Ministry Institute™, however, will be a training organization focused on developing outdoor-leaders-as-missionaries, and it will follow the Outdoor Leadership International™ technical standards for competency in the outdoors.

Wilderness Ministry Institute™ (a ministry of Outdoor Leaders International™) is committed to developing outdoor ministry leaders in every city so that young people will have an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ through a guided wilderness adventure. We will provide the highest possible training at the lowest possible cost since our objective is *missional*. We are committed to training and developing proven, effective youth workers as skilled outdoor leaders. We specialize in taking committed youth workers to the next level in becoming a skilled outdoor leader. In principle we will not focus our training on individuals who might have exceptional outdoor leadership experience yet do not have any youth work or youth ministry experience. Applicants, who fit this category, will be encouraged to invest a year in working among youth to develop their heart and experience with young people before participating in our certificate program.

In following the norms of international outdoor leadership certification, we have developed an *award scheme* for different levels of training. Our basic level of training, which is the subject of this project design, is called WMI Wilderness Guide I. There are four levels of minimum skill and experience for a young leader who desires to complete the WMI Wilderness Guide I training: 1) *Youth Ministry Experience*: Participants in this certificate program will be mature followers of Jesus Christ, age 19 or older, who have minimum experience of one school year working with adolescent young people in a ministry setting. 2) *Experience in the Outdoors*: Participants must display an interest

and ability to lead groups of young people in the outdoors: Minimum log required of 5 days experience camping in the wilderness (at least one hour away from civilization). 3)

Recommendation from supervisor: Trainees will be invited to participate in the certificate program only after receiving an official OLI recommendation form provided by the program leader or pastor who will be supervising their ministry among young people in their local setting. 4) *Physical fitness:* Participants must complete a two-mile timed run. Men must complete the run in 16 minutes, and women must complete the run in 18 minutes.

There are nine specific competencies which we will outline below in the form of a syllabus for the WMI Wilderness Guide I award. These competencies will be learned through classroom teaching and dialogue as well as through hands-on outdoor experiences. Several of the competencies will be tailored to the specific mission context through pre-training interviews and analysis of each given situation so that each course will be well-attended, efficient (having previously considered potential obstacles), and locally relevant. We have organized the following section of our project design into three categories per competency: 1) The title of the competency in which each trainee will be required to demonstrate proficiency in order to receive the WMI Wilderness Guide I award, 2) a general overview of the competency, and 3) a specific description of each competency to be assessed by a WMI or OLI instructor.

The technical outdoor competencies (#3-#8) have been adapted from an array of international bodies including the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association, International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations, and American Mountain Guides Association. We have also adapted many of the technical requirements from internationally recognized standards highlighted in the following resources: New

Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association *Rock Instructor Level I Syllabus, Abseiling for Instructors* by Bev Smith, *Mountaintech*, by Mountain Safety Council New Zealand, *Freedom of the Hills* by The Mountaineers, *Medicine for Mountaineering, and Outdoor Safety; Risk Management for Outdoor Leaders*; by the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council.

Competency #1 Familiarity with the Significance of Wilderness Journeys in the Bible

The WMI Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate a Biblical understanding of the wilderness as a special place for transformation⁴⁶⁸, as well as an ability to apply this principle in the planning, implementation, and follow up stages of a wilderness journey.

1.0 Understanding of the Biblical Significance of the Wilderness

- 1.1 Demonstrate a basic understanding of the experiential nature of Jesus Christ's teaching and training methods (from chapter 2 of this thesis).⁴⁶⁹ A *WMI Wilderness Guide I* will be able to apply aspects of Jesus' teaching and training methods to a multi-day planned wilderness adventure with young people.
- 1.2 Demonstrate an understanding of basic experiential learning techniques in relation to outdoor leadership programs (from chapter 3 of this thesis).
- 1.3 Demonstrate an understanding of Jesus Christ's rhythm of engagement and retreat and the relevance of His example to wilderness journeys, local ministry and discipleship in the city (from chapter 4 of this thesis).
- 1.4 Demonstrate an understanding of a Biblical theology of wilderness and missions; The experiential nature of Jesus Christ's apprenticeship methods and the role of wilderness experiences in His life, ministry, and training strategies (from chapter 5 of this thesis).
- 1.5 Demonstrate an ability to integrate an understanding of the purpose (why) for each element of a typical wilderness experience as well as note desired outcomes (relational and spiritual) for key activities during the

⁴⁶⁸ Ashley Denton, "Toward a Theology of Wilderness Journey", Unpublished D.Min. Project, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2005: vi.

⁴⁶⁹ Ashley Denton, "Literature Review; The Experiential Nature of Jesus Christ's Teaching and Training Methods," Unpublished D.Min. Project, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2005: 10.

adventure. This process will enhance the guide's ability to be attentive to and prayerful for individual and group needs, as well as to enhance his or her ability to help other leaders on the trip understand the significance of their role in the discipleship process as they go back home with the young people they brought on the trip.

Competency #2 Leadership and Ministry

The WMI Wilderness Guide I will develop an understanding and practice of servant leadership with a group during the journey—creating a community environment that reflects God's design for relationship with Him and others.

2.0 Leadership and Ministry

- 2.1 Active listening
- 2.2 Personal evangelism and discipleship
- 2.3 Ministry of hospitality
- 2.4 Understanding group dynamics; how to skilfully involve each person on the journey, providing meaningful opportunities to work and serve others, while balancing the adventure experience with adequate play, and rest for each participant—helping them to feel like an significant part of the group.
- 2.5 “Must list” for trips:
 - o 2.5.1 Learning names
 - o 2.5.2 Ice breakers/initiative games
 - o 2.5.3 Care of equipment and packing station procedure
 - o 2.5.4 Hypothermia talk
 - o 2.5.5 Dehydration talk
 - o 2.5.6 Blister prevention and care talk
 - o 2.5.7 Rest step and pace talk
 - o 2.5.8 What to do if lost talk
 - o 2.5.9 TIFF (Toilet In Forest Floor) procedure
 - o 2.5.10 No trace camping talk
 - o 2.5.11 Avalanche avoidance and what to do if caught
 - o 2.5.12 Trail Talks; at least three from memory with Scripture
 - o 2.5.13 Daily team meetings and prayer with leaders
 - o 2.5.14 Learning songs
 - o 2.5.15 Time around campfire or meal sharing
 - o 2.5.16 Free time structured into week
 - o 2.5.17 One on one time with each participant
 - o 2.5.18 Meal questions and discussions
 - o 2.5.19 Setting up quiet times daily with well-crafted questions
 - o 2.5.20 Rainy day activities prepared
 - o 2.5.21 Share the value of stress and challenge

- 2.5.22 Scripture memory
- 2.5.23 Body of Christ/gifts talk
- 2.5.24 Servanthood modeled and discussed
- 2.5.25 Gospel presented clearly
- 2.5.26 Team relationships:
 - Pre-trip planning
 - Daily team meetings; prayer, feedback, planning
 - Problem-solving
 - Guide relationships with other counsellors/leaders
- 2.5.27 Counselling skills:
 - Active listening
 - Communication and care
 - Directive
- 2.5.28 Closure; evaluation and goal setting for home⁴⁷⁰

Competency #3 First Aid and Backcountry Safety

The WMI Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate *competence* and *confidence* in administering any medical treatment that may be needed in the wilderness setting.⁴⁷¹ “Wilderness” first aid is different than “front country” first aid in that the wilderness caregiver is usually an hour or more away from medical help and must take into account potential long term treatment of the patient as well as evacuation procedures.

3.0 Wilderness First Aid Protocol

- 3.1 Anticipating, recognizing, diagnosing, and caring for:
 - Soft-tissue injuries
 - Anaphylactic shock
 - Fractures
 - Head injuries
 - Chest and abdominal injuries
 - CPR
- 3.2 Ability to recognize and treat injuries due to environment:
 - Heat or cold injuries
 - Altitude disorders

⁴⁷⁰ Brahler, Denton, and Fuchs, 15.

⁴⁷¹ Overview adapted from *Medicine for Mountaineering*, Wilkerson, James A., editor, 1992.

- 3.3 Ability to recall and perform necessary treatments:
 - Patient medical history
 - Primary and secondary physical examination
 - Techniques of patient care and administration of medications
 - Knowledge of mental disorders, infectious disorders likely to be encountered on a multi-day journey.

Competency #4 Navigation and Orienteering

The *WMI* Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate an ability to effectively plan and lead a group through the wilderness by using map, compass, and terrain travel knowledge.

4.0 Navigation and Orienteering

- 4.1 Ability to read a topographic map and use a compass; involving map orientation, taking accurate bearings, and making declination adjustments.
- 4.2 The *WMI* Wilderness Guide I will also demonstrate skill in using map and compass to navigate in a field setting as well as to communicate reference and navigation information to others effectively.
- 4.3 Familiarity with regionally specific terrain travel knowledge, e.g. time it takes to travel through varied vegetation and landscape features.
- 4.4 Weather: Demonstrate a basic understanding of local weather patterns.
- 4.5 Water Safety
 - Demonstrate best practice for individual, mutual support, and recovery methods for varied river crossings.

Competency #5 Rock Climbing and Abseiling/Rappelling Equipment

The *WMI* Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate a basic proficiency in the fundamentals of rock climbing and abseiling/rappelling.

5.0. Rock Climbing & Abseiling/Rappelling Equipment

- 5.1 Familiarity with rope coiling, proper placement of anchors for belays and abseils, and skilful use of knots:
 - Water knot
 - Figure 8 on a Bight
 - Figure 8 Retrace
 - Double Fisherman's Knot

- Fisherman's Backup
- Münter/Italian Hitch (p. 101 in *Freedom of the Hills*)
- Klemheist (p. 100 in *Freedom of the Hills*)
- Classic Prussik Knot
- Half Hitch

□ 5.2 Describe the advantages and disadvantages of equipment used for rock climbing and reasons for choice:

- Static rope
- Rappel/abseil devices
- Helmets
- Prussik cord
- Carabiner types
- Dynamic rope
- Tubular webbing
- Harnesses
- Belay devices

□ 5.3 Describe how to evaluate the wear of equipment (e.g. – internal/external wear of ropes and webbing and harnesses, wear to carabiner, belay, and abseil devices, helmet wear and stress, when to retire equipment).

□ 5.4 Complete a log of the equipment used

Competency #6 Rock Climbing Skills⁴⁷²

The WMI Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate an ability to teach and model belaying and abseiling/rappelling techniques including verbal commands and basic rock climbing techniques.

6.0 Rock Climbing Skills

□ 6.1 Personal Safety

- 6.1.1 Always model personal safety during set up and operations.

6.2 Anchors

- 6.2.1 Demonstrate the construction of a variety of workable, safe anchor systems which minimize potential shock loading, share the load, have

⁴⁷² Adapted largely from *New Zealand Outdoor Leader Association Rock I standards*, www.nzoia.org.nz.

minimal angles and allow the rope to run smoothly. Set up two point equalizing and multipoint equalizing anchors.

- 6.2.2 Demonstrate an understanding of the items used for natural anchor construction (e.g. trees, bollards, threads, horns).
- 6.2.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the items used for artificial anchor construction (e.g. wires, stoppers, hexes, and camming devices).
- 6.2.4 Demonstrate the use of bolt anchors (if appropriate for the region).

□ 6.3 Participant Safety

- 6.3.1 Never compromise participant safety.
- 6.3.2 Demonstrate the use of the figure eight device in belaying and abseiling.
- 6.3.3 Demonstrate site and participant safety checks.
- 6.3.4 Teach each participant how to put on a harness correctly and check harness during climbing and abseiling.
- 6.3.5 Teach participant/s how to belay safely.

□ 6.4 Rock Climbing & Abseil/Rappel Operation

- 6.4.1 Construct a top rope system anchor using placed protection, ready for operation within 20 minutes.
- 6.4.2 Climb grade 5.7 (U.S.) or 16 (European). Be able to suit climbs to climbers abilities.
- 6.4.3 Construct a rock climbing and abseil system ready for operation within 30 minutes.
- 6.4.4 Belay Technique: Belay from body & discuss advantages regarding simplicity, preventing “sleeping at the wheel”, and use of this technique in contrast to belaying from anchor if anchor is not considered ‘bomb proof’. Sitting stance verses standing stance for versatility. For rappel/abseils, set up a secondary belay rope with bowline on a coil around participant and belay them down the pitch.
- 6.4.5 Use an effective communication system with the participants during the rock climbing and abseil sessions (“Belay on? On Belay,” “Ready to climb? Climb Away,” “Climbing,” “Tension,” “Slack”, “Off Belay? Belay off”).

□ 6.5 Top Rope Rescues

- 6.5.1 Demonstrate top rope prussik rescue station including: Top rope tension maintained, belay tied off, prussik access up or down rope (if another rope available) to participant, two person self-protected abseil to ground.

□ 6.6 Abseil/Rappel Rescues

- 6.6.1 Demonstrate a release of the abseil rope to allow the participant to free jammed clothing or hair.
- 6.6.2 Demonstrate a controlled lowering of the participant to the ground.

Competency #7 Basic Backcountry Travel, Camping, and Nutrition

The WMI Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate ability to model appropriate hiking/tramping techniques and route finding skills and nutrition with a group.

7.0 Basic Backcountry Travel, Camping, and Nutrition

- 7.1 Hiking/Tramping: Approach, pace, rest step, down hill and side-hill walking, etiquette.
- 7.2 Trails/Tracks: Route finding, trail practices, thick brush, talus, scree, snow (ice axe use), streams.
- 7.3 Camping: Low-impact camping, campfires, washing, sanitation, animals, shelters, sleeping bags, bivouacs.
- 7.4 Nutrition/Food: Composition of foods, endurance, water, food planning, menu suggestions, utensils, stoves (use and repair).

Competency #8 Clothing and Equipment

The WMI Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate an ability to identify the different types of clothing and equipment used in the wilderness setting and explain the purpose of each. The WMI Wilderness Guide I will have the ability to make repairs to equipment when necessary.

8.0 Clothing and Equipment

- 8.1 Layering clothes.
- 8.2 Familiarity with equipment list to effectively lead participants through a packing station in preparation for the trip.
- 8.3 Adjusting packs to optimize participant comfort.

Competency #9 Trip Administration and Organization

The WMI Wilderness Guide I will be able to demonstrate an ability to plan and administer all aspects of a wilderness trip including promotion, transportation, and follow up after the trip, etc.

9.0 Trip Administration and Organization

- 9.1 Pre-trip planning
- 9.2 Promoting the trip and recruiting young people
- 9.3 Promotion techniques for parents of young people
- 9.4 Understanding liability, etc.
- 9.5 Transportation
- 9.6 Fund raising as appropriate
- 9.7 Follow up

CHAPTER 7

OUTCOMES (CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS)

Follow-up is Essential: Ongoing Quality, Safety, and Technical Training to Insure Sustainable Models which can be Multiplied as Opportunities are Presented

Our strategy is to develop indigenous outdoor leaders that will eventually be able to organize an ongoing outdoor program in a city or region for the purpose of making disciples of young people who will be transformed in relation to Jesus Christ; engaging in the transformation of their city as the fruit of their relationship with Jesus. Our hope is to develop “local tech” forms of training which do not introduce foreign ideas, materials, or equipment so that any young person in a given city or region would be comfortable participating in an outdoor adventure. In our experience, one of the primary hindrances towards sustainability of a program like this is the need for “community” among the outdoor leaders. They need time together to worship, pray, develop skills, share ideas, and have time to strategically plan how to reach more kids year after year.

Our goal is to multiply sustainable outdoor ministry models throughout the world which are owned and incorporated locally, thus we will be committed to interdependent relationships where we help leaders network nationally and internationally for mutual encouragement, support, and training. Our goal is to develop training hubs with indigenous leaders who will be capable of serving as a trainer for OLI and WMI in their given country. We propose a plan of developing training hubs in the following areas over the next ten years:

1. New Zealand: Christchurch
2. Asia: Nagano, Japan
3. United States
 - a. West: Colorado
 - b. West Coast: Los Angeles
 - b. Southwest: Phoenix
 - c. Pacific Northwest (Seattle) or Alaska (Anchorage)
 - d. Northeast
 - e. Southeast
4. Europe
5. South America
6. Australia: Sydney
7. Canada: Vancouver

In drafting several five year goals, we have come up with the following objectives:

1. Establishing training hubs in the U.S., New Zealand and Japan.
2. Develop 10 church partners with new wilderness ministries established
3. Create a partnership with at least one overseas English as a Second Language (ESL) missionary teacher preparation organization, for the purpose of training English teachers in outdoor leadership as an evangelistic tool in creative access countries.
4. Develop 75 trained guides as part of our network with the *WMI* Wilderness Guide I award.
5. Develop eight Outdoor Leadership International mission staff to serve as guide trainers. Their local involvement could include helping with church planting, teaching ESL, or initiating student movements in their region in collaboration with church or parachurch organizations. Our initial target is Asia and the Pacific.

Some of the challenges we anticipate in the short term are as follows:

1. Recruiting potential outdoor leaders.

2. Developing excellent trainers.
3. Providing resources and equipment for groups to ensure the lowest possible cost.
4. Communicating and persuading leaders of churches and para churches in the value of developing their own wilderness ministry program.
5. Developing excellent staff to carry out the mission of OLI and WMI.
6. Developing a Board of Trustees or advisory board that will commit to our vision.

Future Study Proposed for Cross Cultural Application of the Suggested Theological Principles Regarding Wilderness and Missions

In conducting the preceding research, several questions have arisen regarding the cross cultural application of our project design. For instance, why would a church or parachurch ministry want to invest in developing a wilderness adventure program? We have provided a theological framework to provide some motivation toward this end, but the question still remains as to how we might persuade churches and ministries to invest the necessary financial and people-resources into developing an outdoor ministry.

Regarding this question, it may be beneficial to pursue a writing project aimed specifically at the topic of spiritual formation and discipleship among youth workers today and the need for intentional retreats in the wilderness to enhance fruitfulness in local ministry in the city. This could be a first step to plant a seed for many youth workers who have never considered organizing wilderness adventures as a way of developing young disciples.

A second question which needs further research is whether or not wilderness adventures are equally effective as evangelistic tools compared to their effectiveness as a discipleship tool. In answering this question, we may be able to initiate a much needed

dialogue around the meaning of discipleship among young people today. We assert a presumption that there is a need for a scholarly challenge to our contemporary tendency to partition evangelism and discipleship activities among young people today. In our observation, most youth workers who are engaged in wilderness ministry as a part of their annual ministry plan usually view these outings as a discipleship activity, and often unintentionally form homogenous groups of church-going young people to attend the trip, rather than forming groups mixed with non-believers and believers alike. It is important for youth workers today to have dialogue regarding the reality that the making of disciples is an integral part of the evangelism process. Although this topic extends beyond the scope of our thesis, it is important to note that there is a wide body of mission research which would support this view.

Several other questions require further research. For example, how do we appropriately move toward churches in various cultural contexts with new ideas, i.e. how do we “scratch where they itch” to encourage them to think about ministering to their young people through outdoor adventures? Also, how might we help develop a branch of ministry that would offer resources such as providing gear at a low cost? Or, what types of issues will we face in terms of permitting with National Forests or their equivalent in various cultural contexts, i.e., what types of requirements will there be in terms of skills, standards of guides, and what (if any) amount needs to be paid for permits to use wildlands.

Also, what are the benefits of a church or ministry developing their own model versus combining efforts with another church or ministry in the city to form a collective outdoor program? What are the costs involved to develop a program in a city? In

addition, how might these types of activities be used as a kick-off to start a new group, i.e. what is their evangelistic and team building value? And what about churches or groups who would like to take a trip, but do not have any people willing or able to be trained to lead it? Will there be a network of trained people in their city that would be willing to lead a trip for them? Answers to these questions may lead to important discussions pertaining to ecumenism in a city for the purpose of spreading the gospel.

We also need further research to address the following concerns which have the capability of being obstacles to stop the momentum of our vision:

1. Many people have never experienced a wilderness journey.
2. It requires trained people to lead quality wilderness adventures.
3. It usually requires financial resources to provide necessary equipment for a quality experience.
4. We do not have a large network of key churches yet to promote this mission.
5. We need to build an infrastructure to handle the growth once people are interested. We are not yet prepared to handle large numbers of people who might embrace this vision. Our model must be sustainable, so we must find a way to lay a strong foundation before we start building the mission organization and making it publicly known.
6. We do not know several of our target regions well enough yet to be confident in using them as a training ground.
7. We need assessments and recognized certifications to legally lead young people on outdoor adventures in some cultures (especially New Zealand, Australia, and other Western cultures).
8. We need a strong team of people who share this vision to organize a strategy to prepare, build, and then initiate and implement the vision.
9. We need a tool to convince key leaders and opinion-influencers in cities of the vital role of wilderness adventures for their young people.

10. We need to figure out a way to get key leaders to experience a wilderness adventure for themselves and/or with a few of their key young people so that they can see the growth that takes place and become convinced that it is worth the effort to promote this in their church or organization.
11. We need to know who the key leaders are in various target cities—those who are engaged in quality relational youth ministry with young people. Then we need to have a strategy to pursue interdependent and collaborative relationships with them.
12. Where are there healthy youth ministries in Asia and the Pacific? How do we find them and begin to build relationships with key leaders so we can serve them?

Challenging the Double-Edged Sword of Professionalism

At least in the West, the days of any average “Joe” heading to the hills with a group of young people for an adventurous journey is coming to a close. The media has risen to a position of such influence that any negative incident with young people hits the headlines and fuels the fires of litigation. With the U.S. taking the lead, Western societies are becoming more and more litigious which leads to a heightened emphasis on safety and professionalism in every field—especially those which interface with young people. As this trend gains steam, we observe that many opportunists have seized the occasion to make money through advocating professionalism in many fields pertaining to the safety and well-being of young people. Here we must contemplate the ironic double-edged-sword of professionalism.

Professionalism usually derives from a good desire to increase special knowledge and skill in a field so as to provide the highest standards of security and safety to the public. This is a godly pursuit; seeking to excel to the best of one’s abilities to provide the best product or service we can, to people who are created in God’s image. This pursuit brings glory to God. But just as with every good pursuit, the principalities of the

world seek to subtly pervert every good effort in order to take away glory from God.

Throughout the history of Israel and the church we observe a tendency toward professionalism in ministry; whether it was the priest-shepherds of the Old Testament, the Pharisees, or professional pastors of today; without intentional efforts to remain on equal ground with their sheep, the pastor will be tempted to become professional, thus separating himself from the needs of his sheep.⁴⁷³ We argue that leadership in ministry is *not* a professional vocation; meaning pastors or leaders are called to *spiritual leadership* rather than to a vocation of savvy salesmanship or business in the marketplace.

We have observed this troubling trend in the field of outdoor leadership as well. On the positive side, there is a drive for safety standards among outdoor leaders to minimize risk and maximize safety. Yet this comes at great expense! The opportunists in the outdoor leadership world have seized the opportunity (probably unwittingly) to provide training and certifications at a cost which only those with considerable wealth could ever afford. For the average young leader to receive the training, apprenticeship, and certification he might need to work as a “professional” outdoor leader, the cost would be in the thousands of dollars. Ironically the people driving the professionalism of outdoor leadership are the organizations that specialize in outdoor leadership training and certification. From our observation, for instance in New Zealand, organizations like NZOIA⁴⁷⁴ and OutdoorsNZ actually lobby for higher professional standards, and seek to

⁴⁷³ Ezekiel 34 provides a helpful apologetic for the perils of professionalism in ministry: “...therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I shall demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I shall deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be food for them.’” (Ezekiel 34:9-10)

⁴⁷⁴ “New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association Website,” http://www.nzoia.org.nz/about_us/index.asp (accessed July 28, 2006). This organization states several objectives relevant to our argument regarding the rise of professionalism. The following are NZOIA’s objectives: “To retain and grow our professional membership, to promote and safeguard standards of professional practice, to provide sequential training and assessment for outdoor

influence stricter government regulation on outdoor leadership.⁴⁷⁵ The same ethos rings true with the American Mountain Guide Association. Their 2006 strategic plan states the following objective: [Our goal is to], “Unify the guiding community in the U.S. and within the AMGA; Seek to have every working U.S. guide a member of the organization and in support of education, certification, and standards.”⁴⁷⁶ The 1999 AMGA board resolutions again state their objective—yet even more emphatically: “The long-term goal for the AMGA is to see certification become the standard for U.S. guiding.”⁴⁷⁷

Although this may appear as a noble goal, we have great concern with the implications of this move toward professionalism in the field. With professionalism comes a higher cost for training, resulting in fewer people being able to gain “necessary” certifications. This trend ultimately develops elitism in the field, resulting in fewer young people being able to freely engage in outdoor adventures.

Ironically the closest comparison to an outdoor leader in ancient societies mentioned in the Bible would have been a shepherd (they were the outdoor “professionals” of their day). The simple standard of measurement for a shepherd was whether or not they were good and trustworthy in caring for and defending their sheep. As a shepherd boy proved to be trustworthy, his father would entrust him with more sheep (1 Samuel 16:11a, 1 Samuel 17: 34-37). There was certainly a host of unique skills involved in effective shepherding, but the cost for “training” was usually the time and

leaders, representing the interests of our membership by fostering relationships within the outdoor community, to be actively involved in the enjoyment and conservation of our environment.”

⁴⁷⁵ “Outdoors New Zealand,” <http://www.outdoorsnz.org.nz/> (accessed July 27, 2006). This organization claims to advocate and represent the interests of outdoor professionals: “Representing our members views to the public, government and private organisations to maximise the relevance of, and support for outdoor recreation throughout New Zealand.”

⁴⁷⁶ “American Mountain Guide Association Website,” <http://www.amga.com/> (accessed July 27, 2006).

effort of a loving father whose goal was to bring his son to maturity by apprenticing him in the trade. There were no monetary costs to the boy; only the cost of the sweat of his brow and the sacrifice of living in the outdoors with a flock of helpless sheep. He would guard them from danger, lead them to food and water, and bind up their wounds day after day. This Biblical model of training is sustainable and reproducible in any society because the greatest measurable cost is relational in nature rather than monetary.

Our vision with Outdoor Leadership International is to be *in* the world of outdoor leadership but not *of* it. We desire to remove the obstacle of high costs for training, and provide extremely low cost training and apprenticeship to multiply leaders exponentially for the purpose of our mission: To introduce young people to Jesus Christ through outdoor ministry. We recognize the professionalism of the field, so we must provide training and certifications equal to the standards set by the international community of outdoor leadership organizations. But we also believe we can do this as a mission organization. Our aim is to develop a staff of trainers who are supported as missionaries to engage in our mission to recruit, train, send, and sustain young leaders for the city through wilderness ministry. Missiologist and theologian, Peter Kuzmič, agrees that there is wisdom in mission organizations strategically positioning themselves to capitalize on the driving forces behind global changes (like the change in professionalism of outdoor leaders we have mentioned):

Driving forces cannot be controlled, but they must not be ignored... you can use them.... Position yourself so that the driving forces push forward your organization or mission towards some kind of future well-being....Take hold of the present and transform it. Don't live in the past, or future, and don't flee into

⁴⁷⁷ AMGA Board of Directors, "Amga Long Range Plan," March 2, 2004, http://www.amga.com/members/mission_2004.pdf. (accessed July 28, 2006).

your own private monasticism. Face the realities in the name of Christ and seek to transform them; live responsibility.⁴⁷⁸

Potential Spin-offs in Asserting *Outdoor Leadership as Mission*

Creative Access Countries

As we explore *outdoor-leadership-as-mission*, we must consider the opportunities we might have in frontier mission fields or creative access countries. We propose further research to determine the viability of using outdoor education programs as a potential strategy for language teachers in creative access countries to use as a means for relational evangelism and discipleship in the spiritually subversive theater of creation.⁴⁷⁹ We often hear of ESL teachers investing a year or two in an un-reached people group sowing seeds of the gospel through the non-verbal witness of their love and sacrifice for young people in the role of an English teacher. Yet we wonder if there may be many missed opportunities as ESL teachers often express frustration or difficulty in that they may not have an avenue to share their faith in Jesus Christ. We wonder if outdoor education/ministry could be an effective way for these missionaries to sow seeds of the gospel through experiential learning events in the outdoors, where young people may naturally consider questions about their Creator. In the outdoor education setting, the teacher might more freely be able to facilitate a process of *briefing, doing, and debriefing*

⁴⁷⁸ Peter Kuzmič, "Theology of Missions in Dialogue: Globalization and Ecumenical Perspectives," Lecture delivered to Doctor of Ministry in Missions and Cross Cultural Studies Cohort, January 25, 2006, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA.

⁴⁷⁹ We propose a conceptual understanding of outdoor education as essentially a form of wilderness ministry in a secular context.

an experience; asking questions during teachable moments which *prompt spiritual thinking* about the existence and character of the Creator-God.

International Institute of Youth Ministry™ (IIYM) Proposal

A second potential spin-off from developing outdoor-leadership-as-mission is the possibility of influencing a broader community of youth workers throughout the world (beginning with an Asian focus). From our involvement in Japan specifically we have observed a critical need for more effective youth ministry training among youth workers. The outdoor adventure ministry (Northstar) we have helped develop in Japan has focused on providing a place for some international schools and church groups to bring young people to experience adventure in the outdoors. We believe, as stated in our introduction that throughout Asia there is a critical shortage of youth workers and youth worker training. As we have shared our vision among Asian leaders, it has become clear that there is a significant opportunity to influence the church in Asia Pacific through dynamic youth ministry training.

Before we can take young people into the outdoors, we must reach them first on the street. There is a symbiotic relationship between our vision of OLI and the need for a general uplift of youth ministry in Asia. Without improving youth outreach and discipleship, there will be little chance for successful development of outdoor ministry. As we collaborate and support indigenous youth movements in Asian cities particularly, we believe there will arise opportunities to take key leaders deeper in their walk with Christ through introducing spiritual formation opportunities through wilderness retreats. We have already begun to form AIYM (Asia Pacific Institute of Youth Ministry; a satellite of IIYM) to serve the purpose of providing high quality youth ministry training

in Asia Pacific to serve existing youth leaders in this region. And our hope is that through a symbiotic relationship with OLI, we will see better recruitment, multiplication, and sustainability of youth workers to engage the youth of cities throughout the world.

APPENDIX I

**A Catalogue of Wilderness Journeys throughout the Bible where the Text Explicitly
Identifies Life-Change Occurring as a Result of the Journey**

Overview: 72 Old Testament journeys, 38 New Testament journeys. Total: 110
Most Instructive: 52 Old Testament and 21 New Testament journeys. Total: 73

<u>*Most Instructive</u>	<u>Passage</u>	<u>Synopsis</u>
*	Genesis 3:23-24	Driven out of the garden
*	Genesis 4:12-14	Cain's punishment
*	Genesis 6:8-22	Noah finds favor with God
*	Genesis 7:1-9:16	The Flood
*	Genesis 11:1-9	Universal Language, Babel, Confusion
*	Genesis 12:1-20	Abraham called to mission
	Genesis 13:1-8	Abraham went up from Egypt to Negev
*	Genesis 14:14-16	Journey into Battle for Kin
*	Genesis 15:1-21	The Lord makes a covenant with Abraham
*	Genesis 18:1-33	The Lord reveals the time of Isaac's birth
*	Genesis 19:26-29	Lot and his family escapes Sodom
*	Genesis 20:1-2	Abraham is not faithful to his wife for the second time
*	Genesis 22:1-19	God Tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac
*	Genesis 32:22-32	Jacob Wrestles with God
	Genesis 35:9-22	Jacob's name changed to Israel
	Exodus 2:15-25	Moses escapes to Midian
*	Exodus 3:1-9	Moses and the Burning Bush
	Exodus 3:10-22	The mission of Moses
*	Exodus 12:33-41	The Exodus
*	Exodus 15:22-27	The Lord provides water
*	Exodus 16:1-7	The Lord provides manna
*	Exodus 16:8-21	The Lord provides meat
*	Exodus 16:22-36	Sabbath observed

*	Exodus 17:1-7	Water from rock; testing the Lord
	Exodus 17:8-16	Amelek fights Moses, Moses lifts his arms in battle
*	Exodus 18:17-27	Jethro counsels Moses
	Exodus 19:1-17	Moses on Mount Sinai
*	Exodus 19:18-25	The Lord visits Sinai
*	Exodus 20	The Ten Commandments
	Exodus 24:15-18	Moses and the Glory of the LORD on Mount Sinai
*	Exodus 34:29-35	Moses' face shines:
	Numbers 13:1-2	The twelve spies
*	Numbers 13:25-33	The twelve spies report to the congregation
*	Numbers 20:8-14	Water of Meribah
	Numbers 22-24	Balak sends for Balaam, (22:1-22), the angel and Balaam (22:22-41), prophecies of Balaam (23:1-30)
*	Numbers 33	Stages of Israel's Journey
	Deuteronomy 34:1-12	The Death of Moses, and God buries Moses in the wilderness
*	Joshua 3	Israel crosses Jordan
*	Joshua 4	Memorial stones at the Jordan River
*	Joshua 24:1-28	Joshua reviews Israel's history and lessons they have learned on the journey
	Judges 7:1-25	Gideon's three hundred chosen men
	1 Samuel 16:14-23	David the musician journeys to minister to Saul
*	1 Samuel 17	David and Goliath
	1 Samuel 23:15-29	Saul pursues David
	1 Samuel 24	David spares Saul's life in the wilderness
	1 Kings 10	The Queen of Sheba journeys to test Solomon
*	2 Chronicles 9:1-12	Queen of Sheba journeys to test Solomon
	1 Kings 18:20-25	Elijah calls upon God to rebuke the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel
	1 Kings 18:36-46	Elijah's prayer
	1 Kings 19:1-8	Elijah flees from Jezebel
*	1 Kings 19:9-21	Elijah at Horeb (whisper from cave)

	Ezra 7:1-10	Ezra's four to five month journey to Jerusalem from Babylon... a scribe who had set his heart on study and practical living it out; committed to teaching the Word of God.
	Nehemiah 2:6	Nehemiah asks to journey to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls... he gives the king a definite timeframe for his journey
*	Job 39	God speaks of nature and its beings... Learning from nature.
*	Job 40:15-24	God's power shown in creatures
*	Job 41	God's power shown in creatures
*	Job 42:1-6	Job's confession
*Creation psalm	Psalm 8	The Lord's glory, and man's dignity
*Creation psalm	Psalm 19	The works and the Word of God
*Creation psalm	Psalm 33	Praise to the Creator and Preserver
*Creation psalm	Psalm 104	The Lord's care over all His works
*Creation psalm	Psalm 139	God's omnipresence and omniscience
*Creation psalm	Psalm 145	The Lord extolled for His goodness
*Creation psalm	Psalm 148	The whole creation invokes praise to the Lord
*Creation psalm	Amos 4:13	Creation psalm
*Creation psalm	Amos 5:8-9	Creation psalm
*Creation psalm	Amos 9:5-6	Creation psalm
*	Isaiah 40	The greatness of God
*	Isaiah 49	Salvation reaches the ends of the earth
*	Isaiah 65:17-25	The new heavens and the new earth
*	Jonah	Jonah and the Whale
	Luke 1:39-56	Mary's journey to visit Elizabeth
*	Matthew 2:1-12	The adoration of the infant Jesus by the three wise men
*	Luke 2:8-20	The adoration of the infant Jesus by the shepherds from the fields
	Matthew 2:13-21	The flight to Egypt and return to Galilee

*	Matthew 3:1-6	John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus' ministry
	Matthew 3:13-17	The baptism of Jesus
*	Luke 4:1-3	The temptation of Jesus Christ
*	Luke 5:1-11	The call of the first disciples and the miraculous catch of fish
*	John 4:4-42	The Journey into Galilee, and encountering the woman at the well
*	Mark 1:35-38	Jesus departs from Capernaum
*	Matthew 12:1-8	Plucking grain on the Sabbath
*	Mark 3:7-12	Jesus heals the multitudes by the sea
*	Mark 3:13-19	Jesus chooses the Twelve
	Mark 4:23	Jesus' first preaching tour in Galilee
	Mark 2:13-17	The call of Levi
*	Mark 4:35-41	Stilling the storm
	Mark 5:1-20	The Gadarene demoniacs
*	Matthew 10:1-16	Commissioning the Twelve on their first mission journey
	Matthew 8:18-22	On following Jesus
*	Mark 6:30-31	The return of the Apostles
*	John 6:1-15	Five thousand are fed
	Mark 8:1-10	Four thousand are fed
*	Mark 6:45-52	Walking on the water
*	Mark 8:27-30	Peter's confession of Christ
*	Luke 9:28-36	The Transfiguration
	Luke 10:1-12	Commissioning the Seventy
	Luke 10:17-20	The return of the seventy
	John 10:40-42	Jesus withdraws across the Jordan River
	John 11:54-57	Jesus retires to Ephraim
	Mark 11:12-14	The cursing of the fig tree
	Mark 11:20-26	The fig tree is withered
*	Mark 14:32-42	Gethsemane
	Luke 24:1-12	The women at the tomb
	Mark 16:1-8	The women at the tomb
	John 20:14-18	Jesus appears to the women
*	Luke 24:13-35	Jesus appears to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus
*	John 21:1-14	Jesus appears by the Sea of Tiberias
*	Matthew 28:16-20	The Great Commission
	Luke 24:44-53	Jesus' last words and ascension to heaven from the mountain

APPENDIX II

Proposed Statement of Faith for *Outdoor Leadership International*

Preamble

All those who participate in the ongoing work of Outdoor Leadership International (a ministry of Nexus International) shall be in understanding with its central purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to qualify for office, members of the Board of Directors, and members of the regular and volunteer staff and teachers of OLI and Wilderness Ministry Institute courses shall subscribe to the following articles of faith:

Article I

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, being given by divine inspiration, are the Word of God, the final and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

Article II

In the Scriptures, God reveals Himself as the living and true God, Creator of all things. Perfect in love and righteous in all His ways, God is One and exists eternally as a Trinity of persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Article III

God made man in His image that He might have fellowship with Him. Being estranged from God by his disobedience, sinful man is incapable of a right relationship to God apart from divine grace.

Article IV

The only Mediator between God and man is Jesus Christ our Lord, God's eternal Son, who as man fully shared and fulfilled our humanity in a life of perfect obedience.

Article V

By His death in our place, Jesus revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having risen bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven, He rules as Lord over all and intercedes for us as our Great High Priest.

Article VI

The Holy Spirit, through the proclamation of the Gospel, renews our hearts, persuading us to repent of our sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit, we are led to trust in divine mercy, whereby we are forgiven all our sins, justified by faith through the merit of Christ our Savior, adopted into God's family as His children and enabled so to live in the world that men may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Article VII

God, by His Word and Spirit, calls sinful men into the fellowship of Christ's body. Thus He creates the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, united in the bonds of love, endowed with the gifts of the Spirit and summoned by Christ to preach the Gospel and to administer the sacraments, to relieve human need and to strive for social justice.

Article VIII

God's redemptive purpose will be consummated by the return of Christ to raise the dead, judge all men and establish His glorious kingdom. Those who are apart from Christ shall be eternally separated from God's presence, but the righteous shall live and reign with Him forever.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁸⁰ Adapted from *Young Life, Inc.*, "Statement of Faith," <http://www.younglife.org/pages/ylstatement.html>. (accessed July 30, 2006).

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VITA

Stephen “Ashley” Denton was born on November 14, 1970 in Louisville, Kentucky, U.S.A. Ashley met his wife Becky as a backpacking guide at Young Life’s Wilderness Ranch in 1992. He and Becky reside in Fort Collins, Colorado and have four children: Will, Claire, Daniel and Hannah. Ashley presently serves with Nexus International to promote the development of indigenous youth workers in the Asia-Pacific region. He was previously on staff with Young Life for fifteen years, and served as the National Director of Young Life New Zealand from 2003-2006.

He is currently working with a team of indigenous leaders primarily in Asia Pacific to develop the *International Institute of Youth Ministry*TM to provide theological and practical ministry training for indigenous youth workers. An additional focus of his is to direct *Wilderness Ministry Institute*TM, to promote the development of outdoor leaders and programs throughout the world for the purpose of introducing young people to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith through guided outdoor journeys. In January 2007, Ashley completed a three-year Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary specializing in missions and cross cultural studies. He also holds a Master of Arts in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary (1999), and a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from the University of Arizona (1993). His mission philosophy includes.

- ❑ Catalytic youth mission movements are sustained by spiritually healthy mission leaders who are able to inspire spiritual health in their young apprentices.
- ❑ Lifting up the young and the poor through a relational style of evangelism and discipleship.
- ❑ Practical, Biblical training; relevant to each local mission context.